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Gnome

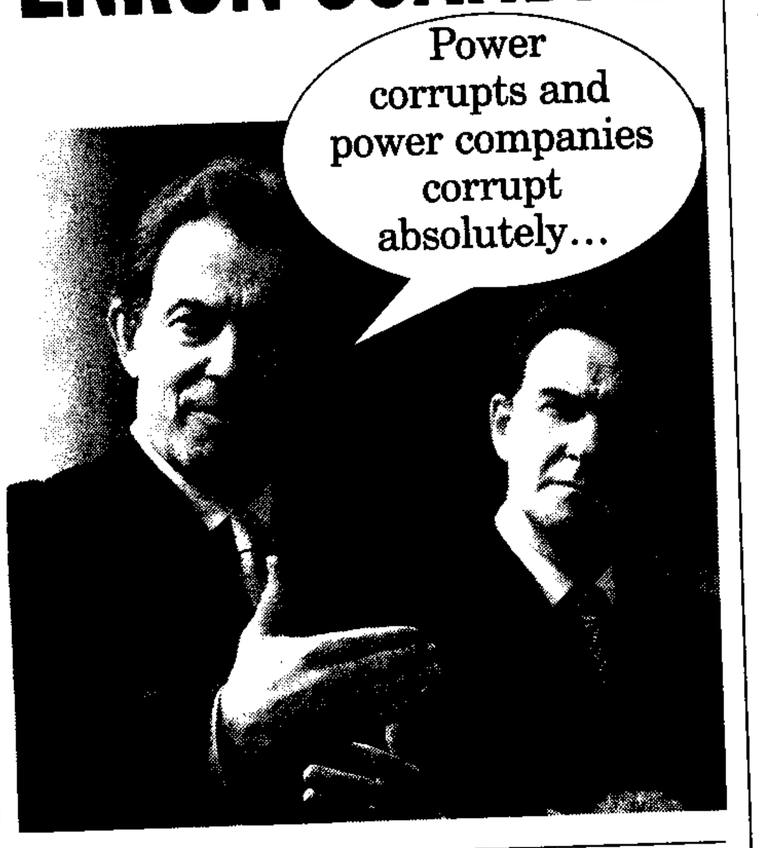
IT IS with great sadness that I have decided to step down as Chairman of the PCC (the 'Press Compliance Commission'), an independent body of newspaper editors, such as Mr Len Filth, Editor of the Sunday Sleaze, and Mr Keith Porn of the Sunday Knockers, who seek to preserve the high salaries of journalism *(Surely "standards"? Ed.)*

My record at the PCC speaks for itself and I hardly need to go into it here since my editor friends have devoted so much space to it in their papers this week.

My departure is a purely temporary expedient in order to allow me time to clear my cheques *(Surely "good name"? Ed.)* in relation to the unfounded allegations regarding the so-called Enron affair. I shall of course retain my full salary and expenses during my absence until such time as I am vindicated by an independent inquiry, almost certainly chaired by a respected figure such as myself.

Lord Gnomeham

ENRON SCANDAL



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ABC

Banging the drum!

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SIR Howard Davies, chairman of the all-embracing regulator, the financial services authority (FSA), announces that he has "highlighted the regulation of audit practices as a priority for review in the coming year". So who will supervise the review?

Few people are better qualified than the FSA's new managing director, appointed last April by chancellor Gordon Brown. He is John Tiner, who at the time of his appointment was head of worldwide services at, er, Arthur Andersen, the accountancy firm that achieved such wonders as auditor to Enron.

Sir Howard said at the time of his appointment: "I am delighted to welcome John Tiner to the FSA. His extensive experience of financial regulation in the UK and overseas will add considerable strength to our top management."

An FSA spokesman told the *Eye*: "Mr Tiner worked in Andersen's financial services division. Enron was dealt with by another division." So that's all right, then.

DELEGATES to the Corporate Security Summit 2002 are promised a scary time when they gather in central London next month to discuss the threat to global capitalism.

Of great interest at the two-day summit (cost per delegate: £1099 plus Vat) will be a talk pencilled in for Wednesday 20 March called "The psychology of fear and its implication for risk management". This will cover such topics as "Maintaining the trust of your employees"; "Judging the level of information to divulge"; and "Legalities involved in managing awareness". Who better to deliver it than Jamie Jemmson... head of security at Enron!

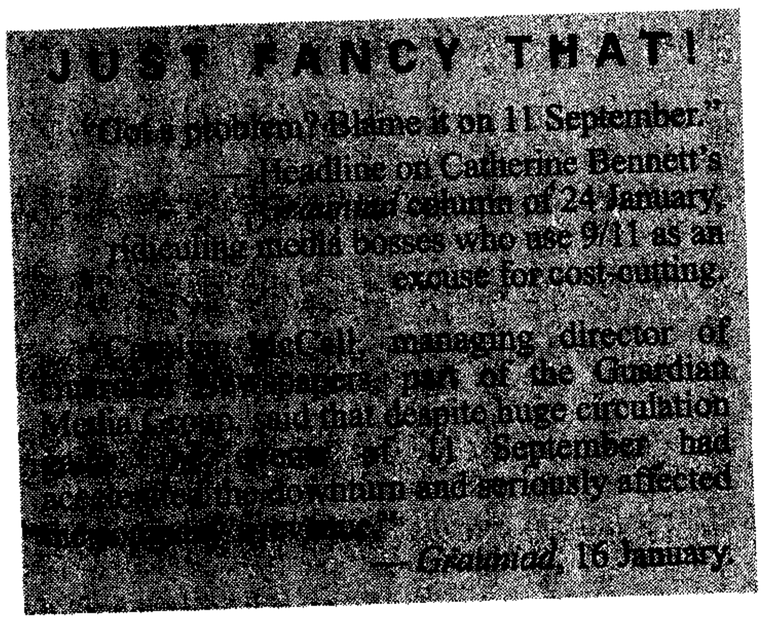
SOME of Labour's defenders focus on the relatively small size of the Enron donation: would the party really have sold itself for a mere £36,000? The sad truth is that the party actively wanted to sell favours to business at any price.

Peter Mandelson's circle was keen to establish strong relations with big business and saw a few small commercial exchanges as a way of bringing them on board. Lobbyist and former Blair adviser John Mendelsohn, of LLM, explained this during Labour's first "cash for access" scandal. He told the *Observer*'s Greg Palast: "Labour's super majority in parliament means the only countervailing force is the media and business community... So when the economy turns soft, as it naturally must, we will make certain they stay with us. If we have business and the media, the people will come with us."

The lobby trade was seen by the "people that matter" in Labour as tying the party and business together. They did not realise this meant tying the party to albatrosses like Enron.

THE *Eye* has received a cheque for £14,291.70, drawn on the Bank of Ireland in the name of Louise Brittain, supervisor of J.W.P. (Jonathan) Aitken.

The cheque is in settlement of the *Eye*'s claims against Aitken for all the bogus libel allegations he made against us. But something must still be wrong in the financial world of Jonathan Aitken. The cheque is unsigned and can't be cashed.


JUST FANCY THAT!
"Got a problem? Blame it on 11 September."
— Headline on Catherine Bennett's [illegible] column of 24 January, ridiculing media bosses who use 9/11 as an excuse for cost-cutting.
[illegible] managing director of [illegible], a specialist part of the Guardian Media Group, said that despite huge circulation [illegible] September had [illegible] the downturn and seriously affected [illegible]
— *Guardian*, 16 January.

"RADICAL surgery" was the media's description of the recommendations of the regulator Postcomm as to what to do with Consignia, the company that runs the post office.

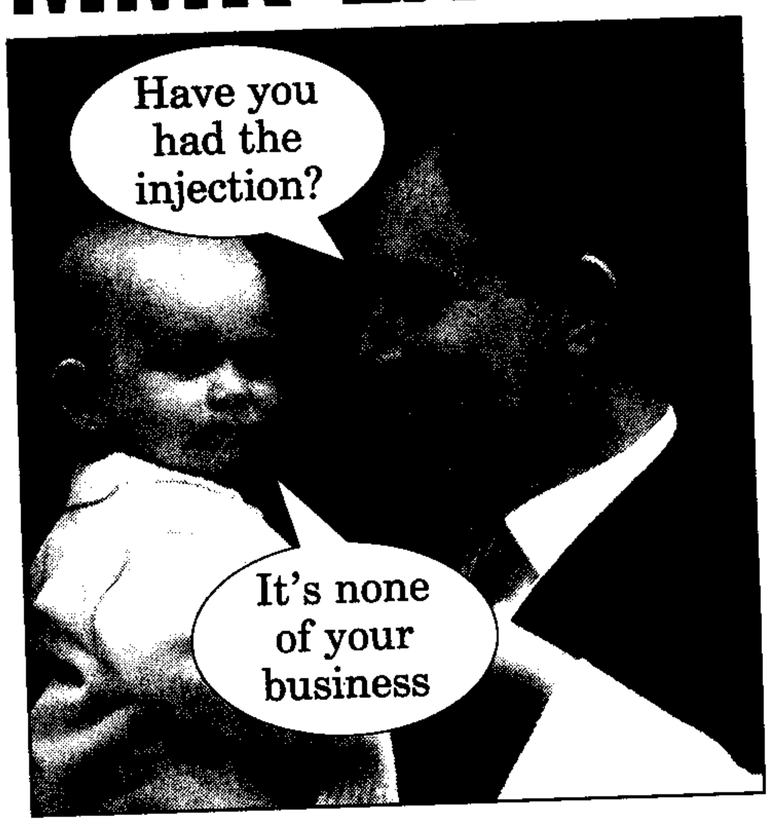
The *Financial Times* reported widespread opposition to the plans from unions and customers. "Only one body came out in support of Postcomm's radical surgey," said the paper, referring to Postwatch, the body set up by the government to represent consumers.

And who are these custodians of post office consumers? The chief executive of Postwatch, Gregor McGregor, used to be head of policy and government relations at Railtrack, where he helped put together the plan to privatise the railways. Another luminary is Kay Dixon, former head of press and public relations at the London Stock Exchange; and yet another is Peter Privett, former customer services director of SEEBOARD, the privatised electricity company for the south-east.

Boris Johnson discusses Uganda

Daily Telegraph

MMR LATEST



Street Of Shame

NOTHING infuriates Richard "Dirty" Desmond more than being described as a porn baron. And yet, curiously, he has now launched a lawsuit which can only draw attention to the contents of his top-shelf titles.

Desmond is suing Deric Botham, who was for many years in charge of such thoughtful journals as *Horny Housewives* but decamped with several colleagues to set up a rival company, Sapphire Multi-Media, after being rebuffed in their attempt to organise a management buyout of Dirty Des's smut empire. Desmond's writ accuses Botham of breaching his contract by using "trade secrets" in his new firm, which publishes such titles as *40 Up* and *Teen Angels*. These presumably include such confidential jazz-mag secrets as what constitutes a "real" wife, whether shaved pubic hair is a turn-on and why there is so much wife-swapping in Nuneaton.

There are, however, several secrets whose disclosure would cause Dirty Des some embarrassment; and Botham may be ready to reveal them if the lawsuit goes ahead. For years, Desmond's mags have been recycling old pictures, many dating from the 1970s, on the grounds that they cost nothing and the one-handed readers will be too preoccupied to notice. Some of the women appearing naked in publications such as *Fifty Plus* and *Mothers-in-Law* are now dead or in retirement homes.

Perhaps this is the ultimate affront to penny-pinching Desmond: Botham and his fellow "traitors" are now using all-new photographs!

THOUGH Richard Desmond is one of the wealthiest men in Britain – at least according to the "rich list" in his own *Sunday Express* – his crusade against extravagance is admirably unrelenting. When his car was pranged recently, his chauffeur was told he would be footing the £500 bill himself.

Meanwhile *Daily Star* editor Peter Hill – who used to enjoy a chauffeur-driven car himself, as befits the editor of a distinguished national newspaper — now drives himself around in a compact Smart car that could easily fit into the boot of Dirty Des's Bentley.

Hill – known fondly to colleagues as "Mentally Hill" – was sent an urgent email by one of his adoring staff last week while entertaining Cherie Blair's PA in his office. The message featured a web address and urged him to click on to it with his volume-control turned up to full for best effect. He duly did so – whereupon the computer began repeatedly bawling, *fortissimo*, "Hey, everyone, I'm looking at gay porn!" The embarrassed editor didn't know how to turn it off, and had to summon luckless deputy Hugh Whittow to rescue him.

What his distinguished visitor from No 10 made of this charming scene is unknown.

FRIENDS of *Sun* editor David Yelland – yes, apparently such people exist – thought they knew why the *Grauniad* diary continually ridiculed him while going easy on arch-rival Piers "Morgan" Moron. The campaign was particularly intense whenever diary editor Matthew Norman was absent and his deputy, Marina "Snide" Hyde, wrote the column. As *Eye* readers will recall, Hyde was the hackette Yelland fired from the *Sun* after discovering scores of "disloyal" emails she sent to her special friend P. Moron from her Wapping terminal.

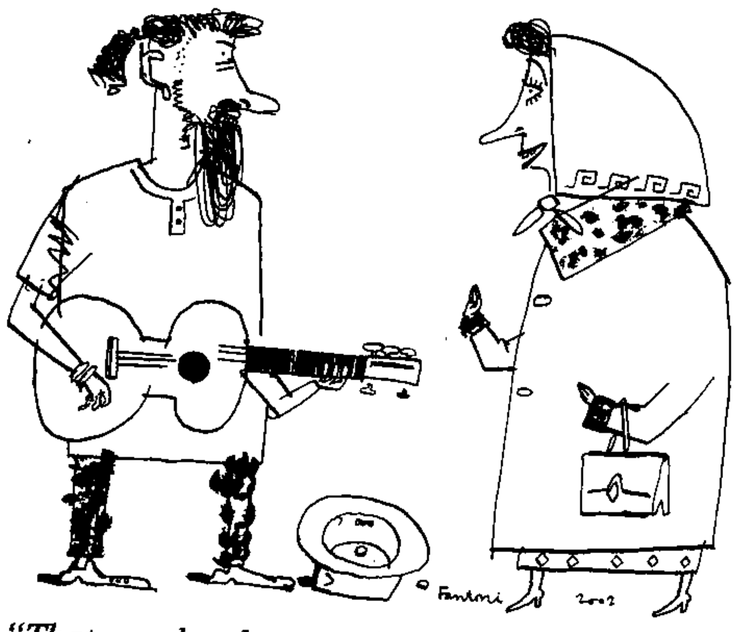
What puzzled the Yelland camp was that Matthew Norman failed to redress the balance on his return, given that he hardly shared the same intimacy with Moron as his lovely deputy or the same obvious desire for revenge.

Lo and behold, it has now been announced that – for a hugely increased fee – Norman is taking his twice-weekly news and sports columns from the London *Evening Standard* to… the *Daily Moron*.

Meanwhile wags at both Canary Wharf and Wapping are dubbing Hyde "the invisible editor". They claim that Marina, a left-wing lawyer-turned-hackette, is responsible for Moron's otherwise inexplicable enthusiasm for liberal and lefty causes, and his proud boasts about bringing people like John Pilger back to the *Mirror*. Only a few years ago Piers was denouncing Pilger as a bleeding-heart fanatic who had helped the *Mirror* lose out to the *Sun* in the circulation war; now he splashes him on the front page.

If Piers wins anything at the British Press Awards, we trust he'll have the decency to acknowledge Marina's contribution in his acceptance speech.

Scenes You Seldom See (3)



"That was lovely – would you play it again?"

Australian police hold two over bushfires

Daily Telegraph

FEARLESS Piers "Morgan" Moron boasts that he'll take the stand in the privacy case brought against the *Mirror* by Naomi Campbell, scheduled to begin on 11 February. The case concerns the *Mirror* photographing the supermodel leaving a Narcotics Anonymous meeting last February.

Intriguingly, Naomi's solicitor, the formidable Keith "Rottweiler" Schilling, has recently acquired a new partner at his firm – none other than Martin Cruddace, bosom pal of Piers Moron and until recently senior lawyer at the *Mirror*.

Cruddace part-owned a racehorse with Moron and, by a remarkable coincidence, Cruddace's parents bought shares ramped by the City Slickers. What's more, since the maritally-challenged editor fled his family home he has lately been living in Cruddace's spare room. We trust this curious arrangement won't lead to arguments over the breakfast table when Piers finds himself up against Cruddace's new employer in the high court.

Meanwhile, the *Mirror* was outraged by the news that Rupert Murdoch's newspapers ran articles by economist Irwin Stelzer praising Enron without always mentioning that he collected an annual £35,000 consultancy fee from the energy giant. "Amazing" screamed a story filling most of one page in Monday's *Mirror*.

With its amusing new high moral tone, no doubt the *Daily Moron* would deliver a similarly scathing judgement on a tabloid paper which urged readers to "fill yer boots" by buying certain shares – without mentioning that its editor already owned a wodge of them and had a financial interest in pushing up the price.

"Does my bomb look big in this?"

FACED with a circulation slump, an advertising crisis and an ongoing mutiny at the grey Lubyanka, "Dirty" Richard Desmond's *Express* has resorted to the time-honoured fallback for any struggling paper: once-in-a-lifetime unmissable advertising promotions every other week.

Readers tempted to switch to the *Express* for a cheap flight or stuffed toy might like to know, however, what lies in store. In most cases, not a lot. In the last 12 months the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) has upheld six separate complaints against misleading promotions published in Desmond's Express newspapers.

Last September it ruled against the *Sunday Express* over a front-page splash offering "FREE OUTDOOR CONCERT TICKETS FOR EVERY READER". What this actually meant was that readers had to ring a premium rate phoneline to enter a competition. If they won the competition they'd get tickets. So the tickets were neither "free" nor "for every reader".

The *Express* then earned a rap a month later for a second front-page ripper offering "FREE ANTI-FAT PILLS THAT REALLY WORK". Regardless of whether the pills really worked or not, readers had to ring another premium rate phoneline and enter a competition for a chance to get hold of them. There was no mention that the prize was only available to 100 people. The *Express* "conceded that their editorial department had been confused about the nature of the promotion", said the ASA, which reminded the rag of its Committee of Advertising Practice Copy Advice Service, which offers a free pre-vetting service to avoid such mishaps.

The same day the ASA upheld a further complaint against Desmond's organ for a "2 FOR 1 TRIPS TO FRANCE" front-page promo. This time no one could quibble with the small print – or indeed any of the print, because inside there was none. In fact the promotion began the next day so those who bought the paper believing there might be some tokens or suchlike had been sorely misled.

The latest batch of ASA rulings has upheld two further complaints. The first screamed "WIN £1 MILLION IN TIME FOR CHRISTMAS AMAZING FIRST CLASS GIVEAWAY" which turned out to be a plug for a Royal Mail prize draw and nothing to do with the *Express* at all. The second was a tie-in with Virgin Atlantic: "RETURN FLIGHTS ALL OVER THE USA FOR EVERY READER". When the complaints flooded in from readers who'd been on the phone for the whole two days of the promotion and were unable to get a fare at the knock-down price, the *Express* pointed the ASA towards the footnote – "Subject to Availability."

ZOE Williams's "Words that should be banned" column in the *Guardian*'s *Weekend* magazine is falling on deaf ears.

When Williams banned the word "Detox" on 5 January, fellow *Grauniad* columnist Hannah Pool wrote a piece about "Detox treatments" in the same issue (see *Eye 1046*). On 26 January Williams selected the word "hardcore" for banishment. A few days later Williams penned a travel article for the *Evening Standard* in which she herself described a trip to Lapland as "truly hardcore".

CYNICISM reigns at the press complaints commission (PCC), where chairman Lord Wakeham has temporarily "stepped aside" to spend more time with his six-figure salary.

Canny Lord Wakeham's PCC regime has shown grovelling support for its paymasters, the press proprietors; and his most ingenious move has been to recruit on to the commission so many of the editors who were likely to be the subject of complaints.

A good example of the mess Wakeham has fostered can be seen in the PCC's recent condemnation of the *Daily Telegraph* for reporting on Euan Blair's university plans – criticism meted out by commissioners who include such pillars of press probity as, er, Neil Wallis, editor of the *People*.

Wallis was of course sitting on the commission when his rag committed the most flagrant breach of privacy rules by publishing on its front and inside pages pictures of Radio 1 DJ Sarah Cox on honeymoon. Cox and her husband had booked a villa attached to a hotel on an isolated island. The *People* photographer booked an adjoining villa and cleverly managed to take pictures of the couple in a bath tub. The *People* circulation leapt by 40,000.

When Cox complained commissioner Wallis's rag apologised at once, thus letting the paper off any press commission censure. Cox, though, has not yet dropped the case.

JUST FANCY THAT!

NATIONAL Gallery director Neil MacGregor came in for fulsome praise in an interview with *Daily Telegraph* hackette Alice Thomson to mark the start of the *Torygraph*'s five week series of art magazines.

"He has never dumbed down," Thomson declares, obviously forgetting to read to the end of her own article where she quotes MacGregor thus: "Titian's *Bacchus and Ariadne*, he says, is perfect for when your boyfriend has dumped you. 'Everyone is Ariadne at some stage. It's the perfect *Bridget Jones* ending'."

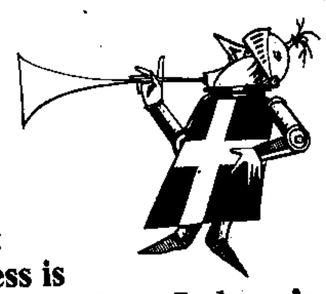
SOME *Times* hacks are beginning to wonder if the paper's new parliamentary sketchwriter Ben Macintyre, son of the Oxford philosopher Alasdair Macintyre, might be a little too well-connected for his own good.

A couple of weeks ago Ben turned up in the unaccustomed role of supplementary film critic to write about *Iris*. As he admitted, however: "I am not an objective reviewer": Iris Murdoch was his godmother.

Soon afterwards Ben reported on the lord chancellor's interrogation by a select committee. Every other sketchwriter concentrated on Lord Irvine's reckless arrogance, but not Macintyre: "Say what you want about Derry Irvine (and don't expect me to agree, because he's an old family friend), this is a most canny bird, whose goose is still a long way from being cooked."

HACKWATCH

Eye Told You So



ACCORDING to the *Spectator*'s media pundit Stephen Glover, "the press is full of fascinating disclosures about Labour's links with Enron and – following my colleague Peter Oborne's brilliant piece last week – with the accounting firm Arthur Andersen." Meanwhile the *Daily Telegraph* notes ministers' unease over the "revelations" concerning their dealings with Enron. The same day's *Independent* also refers to "these revelations" of Labour chumminess with Enron and Arthur Andersen, adding that "doubtless one day, when all concerned have left office, we may find out something resembling the truth."

Actually, something resembling the truth has long been available. But with the honourable exception of Nick Cohen in the *Observer*, who started banging on about Enron several years ago, Fleet Street showed little interest. Those hacks who are now spluttering furiously about how the great and the good somehow failed to notice might pause to consider their own record.

Take the £38,000 Enron gave to "new" Labour. Here's last Wednesday's *Daily Telegraph* editorial: "Were it not for the unfolding scandal in America and some unusually frank comments by the former chairman of Enron Europe, to the effect that the company felt it had to pay money to Labour to meet cabinet ministers, they [the donations] would probably have gone unnoticed." They did indeed go largely unnoticed – but only thanks to Fleet Street's indolence and lack of curiosity.

As we reported on 18 September 1998 (*Eye* 959), "'New' Labour must have been delighted that the initial response to its list of donors focused on the luvvie factor – generous friends like Eddie Izzard and Lisa Stansfield. But, the *Eye* can reveal, the list contains some real corporate horrors. Take Enron, the American gas company…" A fortnight later (*Eye* 960) we gave further details of the swelling influence of "Labour's new chums at energy firm Enron, the dash-for-gas party donors".

All these and many other stories are now being presented as if freshly minted. Last Wednesday, for instance, an *Independent* report began: "Tony Blair actively intervened to water down a moratorium on gas-fired power stations after direct lobbying from energy companies, including Enron, Treasury sources revealed yesterday."

As long ago as June 1999 (*Eye* 979) we wrote that Blair had broken his own government's moratorium on gas-fired power stations, imposed to protect the coal industry, "to give Enron – a Labour Party sponsor – the go-ahead to build a gas station at Teesside". In November we warned that the entire Scottish coal industry was threatened with collapse following a deal struck by "chums of 'new' Labour, the utilities giant Enron" (*Eye* 990). A month later (*Eye* 991), we reported that Enron's takeover of Wessex Water had left millions of English consumers at the mercy of a sleazy American corporation which had "bought its way into 'new' Labour's good books". Last summer (*Eye* 1035) we argued that Enron's financial generosity "seems to have blinded the Labour leadership to the firm's history".

In the latest *Spectator* Stephen Glover grumbles that "you have to look very hard to find any critical comments about Lord Wakeham, the former Tory Cabinet minister, who was a member of Enron's board and its audit and compliance committee", adding that Wakeham's involvement might seem incompatible with his position as chairman of the press complaints commission at a time when his American employers are under press scrutiny. In fact you need look no further than a lengthy "Focus on Lord Wakeham", published in December 1998 (*Eye* 991), which suggested that Enron's obsessive secrecy "sits very oddly with Wakeham's PCC position". In a further piece last June, we noted that Enron's cash had attracted many powerful figures, besides the Labour government. "Lord Wakeham sits on the Enron board. Former electricity regulator Stephen Littlechild worked as a 'consultant' this year for Teesside Power Ltd, the Enron-led consortium… None seems bothered by the firm's record, however" (*Eye* 1035).

Most comical of all is the sudden interest in Arthur Andersen. "It has now emerged," the *Daily Telegraph* observed last Wednesday, "that the firm [Andersen] had helped Labour in opposition." *Now?* In "Arthur Andersen: Save the Wales" (*Eye* 969, 5 February 1999) we noted that "the strong bonds which tie the government to the accounting firm Arthur Andersen" had been forged in opposition, when Andersen partners led by Chris Wales organised training sessions for shadow ministers and advised Gordon Brown on tax policy.

Chris Wales also featured prominently in Peter Oborne's "brilliant piece" two weeks ago, under the headline: "HOW LABOUR COURTED THE MONEY MEN. Peter Oborne reveals that the government brought Enron's accountants in from the cold after they had been sued by the Tories for negligence." Brilliant indeed – even if it might have seemed eerily familiar to anyone who recalls a piece headed "Andersen's Shelter" in *Eye* 938. As we reported, because of the Tory government's long-running lawsuit against Arthur Andersen for negligence in the De Lorean affair, and its banning of the company from all official audit work, "Andersen's duly grew tired of the Tories, and soon after the 1992 election the firm started to take an interest in the Labour Party… As soon as Labour was elected, the clouds lifted on the tangled mess of Arthur Andersen's battle with the government."

This was published on 27 November 1997 – a mere four years before Oborne "revealed" the story all over again.

PS: Arthur Andersen's role in approving Enron's falsely inflated accounts may also give *Eye* readers a slight sense of *déjà vu*. In October 1998 (*Eye* 961) we reported on a "long-running accounting scam" at Allied Carpets which had "falsely boosted the company's accounts by more than £6 million", a scam that had somehow been overlooked "by the firm's distinguished auditors – New Labour's favourite accountant, Arthur Andersen".

WORLD OF SPORT

"I WOULDN'T rely on any footballer as a role model. For me to say to my kids that I don't know the difference between right and wrong and they should look to Beckham or Gazza or Ryan Giggs, well that's crazy, an easy way out." Yup, Linford Christie – multiple gold medallist in shamelessness – is back.

It is a year since the former Olympic 100 metres champion completed his two-year ban for the second positive drugs test of his running career. The lay-off has cost him dear, including a £100,000 BBC contract as a summariser and presenter on children's TV. His doped reputation also got Christie dropped from a "landmark" BBC2 *Black Icons* series, which promised to "tell the story of Linford's career and how, through his sporting ability and dogged desire to succeed, he became one of Britain's best". The idea was dropped when the producers found they could not avoid mentioning his use of banned steroids.

Christie, who has frequently described himself as a "role model", apparently considers it time to reinvent himself in the public eye. Despite his dodgy track record with drugs, the Commonwealth Games organisers in Manchester have signed him on a lucrative promotional deal. Cringe-making appearances on the BBC's *A Question of Sport* and *The Other Half* have followed, though there was no sense of irony when host Dale Winton asked Christie, a father of five children with three different mothers, "What makes for a solid relationship?"

Christie also made himself available recently for a lengthy interview in the *Observer* about what it is like to be black, British and proud. This is the same *Observer* newspaper that Christie said he would never cooperate with as long as Duncan Mackay – one of his most reviled foes in the track rat-pack – was its athletics writer. Mackay is still there.

"His last words were… "Right from today, I'm going to start going to the gym"

IN THE TEAROOM

RUMOURS that Mandy is set for a triumphant return from the wilderness are stirring all kinds of trouble at t'mill. The sad remnant of cloth-capped socialists in the parliamentary Labour party are groaning into their Federation ale once again. Hardly surprising, really. He used to call them "horny-handed sons of toil in greasy overalls" and they still call him a "smarmy metropolitan ponce". They were always, er, unlikely bedfellows.

Yet the real resistance to Mandy's political rehab isn't coming from the unreconstructed fringe. It's coming from those who owe him favours. Where, after all, would Messrs Milburn and Byers be today if Mandy hadn't built the "new" Labour bandwagon for them to jump on? A pair of low-rent, backbench north-east regional fixers, that's where.

But the iciest of cold sweats must surely be forming on the spine (if he's got one) of the defence secretary, Geoff Hoon. At the time of the last fiasco, Mandy's political corpse was still warm when up pops a knife-wielding Hoon to tell the world that the Great Campaigner would be restricted to stuffing envelopes, come the election. Hoon remains unforgiven.

And while the defence secretary has had a pisspoor war, standing on the sidelines as the general staff dealt with the prime minister directly, Mandy has had a good one. Indeed, it's been just like the old "Bobby" days and he's proved as security conscious as the SAS in keeping his back-channels to Tony Blair hush-hush. Even that little episode in Syria, facilitated by Mandy's pals Charles Powell and Wafic Said, tuned out all right in the end. The press conference with Assad may have looked a disaster, but once the boys got into the backroom serious business was done.

Inside Downing Street the atmosphere is edgy. The prime minister has been subject to alarming mood-swings recently – one day standing shoulder to shoulder with public sector workers even when they leave an old dear untreated on a gurney; laying into them as "wreckers" the next.

There is certainly no shortage of bright ideas about where to send Mandy. Off like Lord Lundy and Chris Patten to govern some creaking outpost of empire... Gibraltar perhaps? HM's embassy in Washington if the Bushmen will stand for it? Maybe to replace Lord Levy in the Middle East? All these have the advantage of taking Mandy a long way away. But that may not be what Tony and Cherie (and it will be Cherie's view that will prove decisive here) want. They could yet prove the exception to the rule that there is no gratitude in politics.

'Urquhart'

THE Labour party tells the press that Enron did not give it any "donations" and that it is completely open about its finances. This is because Enron's money came in the form of "sponsorship" or "tickets for dinners".

Labour originally sold the idea of sponsorship to businesses precisely because payments could be hidden. Documents given by Labour party officials to lobbyists in 1998 stated: "Money given to the Labour party as part of a sponsorship arrangement is subject to VAT at the standard rate and is not considered a political donation". Why not? Because "as a business transaction, giving commercial benefits to the sponsor, it does not need to be listed separately in a companies accounts."

Thus the party sold sponsorship precisely because firms did not need to get authorisation from their shareholders. The payments were seen merely as "business transactions" – the sponsors were simply paying money for commercial advantage, not because they had any belief in the party's programme.

When the committee on standards in public life investigated the issue of funding, it did not accept these fine distinctions, however. Nevertheless, in its original response to the committee's report, the government still tried to maintain the fiction that "sponsorship" was in some way different from "donations", stating: "The Neill committee's report recognised that money provided by way of sponsorship may be seen by the sponsor as marketing expenditure, fully justified on commercial grounds alone and the payment for which is not at a favourable rate. The government believes that there may be a case for separating out genuinely commercial arrangements of this kind from other forms of sponsorship which can be more readily equated with a donation in the usual sense. It intends to consider this issue further."

When the political parties and referendums bill was finally published, the then home secretary Jack Straw abandoned this fine distinction, ensuring that all sponsorships and payments in kind needed registering. But this does not seem to have stopped Labour officials from trying to distract attention by denying that Enron's cash amounted to a "donation".

IN THE run-up to the 1997 general election, Tony Blair made great play of Tory plans to privatise the post office. The future Dear Leader even went so far as to host the unveiling of a giant poster outside Conservative Central Office which stated boldly "Don't privatise our Post Office!"

Robin Cook, the future foreign secretary and leader of the House, led a delegation of Labour MPs to Downing Street and deposited sacks of signed petitions urging the government to "think again". After an energetic campaign fronted by postal workers' union, the CWU – with backing somewhat bizarrely from Sir Tim Bell's PR outfit, Lowe Bell – Labour's anti-privatisation campaign was deemed a great success. The post office was saved as a public organisation, and mail would continue to be delivered at the same time and cost to homes in Thurso as in Pimlico.

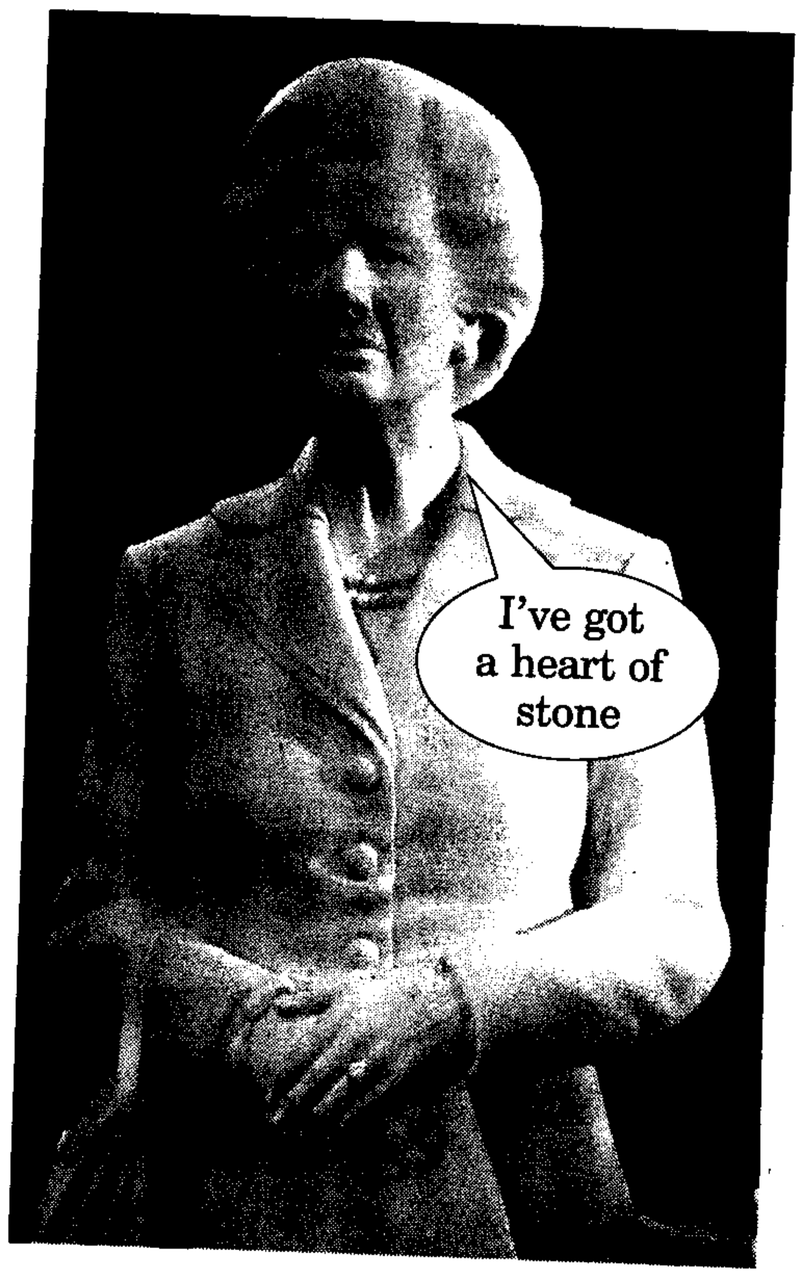
Now as the post office, since renamed "Consignia", prepares to sack thousands of workers and fails to deliver to Thurso or Pimlico before mid afternoon, the likely time of the new first post, the Dear Leader had this to say to leaders of the post office workers' union recently: "There is nothing we can do to prevent postal liberalisation." Apart from unveiling silly posters outside Conservative Central Office, that is.

LABOUR's new general-secretary David Triesman thought he was in for an interesting and challenging job when he took over the reins in Millbank at the beginning of the year. That was until he opened the books and found that a) the party was running an overdraft of several million pounds; and b) party membership figures had been massaged for years.

With some of the unions distinctly edgy about stumping up yet more cash – and some of them on the verge of taking it away – Triesman must sometimes wish he was back at his old union, the Association of University Teachers (AUT), instead of having to sup from such a poisoned chalice. One of the culprits behind Labour's worst ever financial crisis is Triesman's predecessor, the fearsome Margaret McDonagh. She is now general manager of Express Newspapers. But will she do for "Dirty" Des what she once did for "new" Labour?

EVEN hardened hacks gasped in astonishment as the Dear Leader went out of his way to praise the late Sir Ray Powell, the former Labour MP for Ogmore, during his speech to conference-goers at Labour's spring conference in Cardiff.

Powell, a noted party whip and vitriolic



homophobe, may be remembered for many things, but not his tact or diplomacy. When another former party whip, Nick Brown, was showing some Australian guests around the Pugin room in the House of Commons, and introduced them to Powell and guests, Powell complained loudly enough for everyone to hear of the "profusion of Pansies at this time of year".

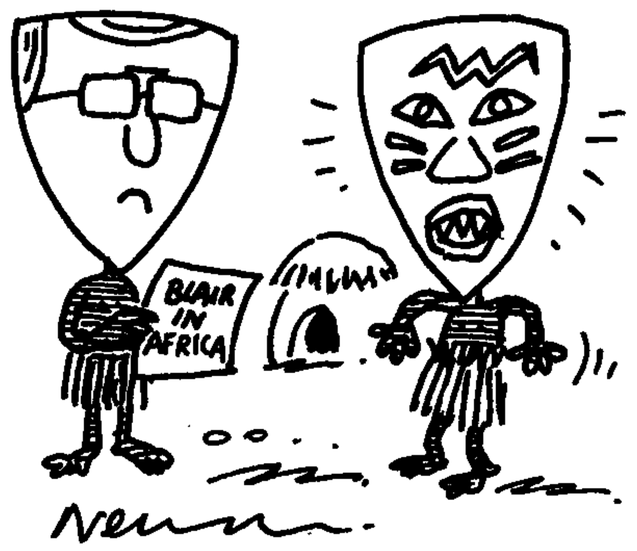
But the old lags were particularly keen to swap stories about Powell's dexterity as a ballot-rigger. In the shadow cabinet elections in the old days he was able to open the boxes and check who had got what before putting in proxy votes garnered from colleagues to aid his favoured chums. Just the sort of politician then to prosper under "new" Labour and to earn valedictory praise from Tony Blair.

THE Labour party is braced for some heavy losses in the May elections, particularly in London. But the activities of Labour members of the Greater London Authority are adding to the party's woes.

On 23 January Labour voted with the Liberal Democrats to slash some £85m from mayor Ken Livingstone's transport budget. Realising the likely backlash, some bright spark hit on the wheeze of asking Labour GLA heavyweight Lord Toby Harris to pen a vigorous defence of their position in the Meeja.

Lord Harris duly obliged... but in the Communist-run *Morning Star* newspaper. Harris's ludicrous exhortations to "Old Labour values of being careful with every penny" caused merriment all round. Especially when it was remembered that the portly Harris had stoked up a huge expense bill after being ferried to GLA meetings in taxis.

'Backbiter'



"Oh no! It's a spin doctor!"

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

MORE on Playboard (see last *Eye*) and strange goings on at the Belfast-based "lead agency for children's play" which is jointly funded by the government and the European union (EU).

As Playboard's management freely admitted, the auditor-general for Northern Ireland was quite right to complain about the agency's fraudulent operation of an EU employment scheme. The fraud came to light after a tip-off from a member of staff. But when Playboard managers discovered they'd been grassed on, the hapless employee – who has not been named – was promptly suspended.

Playboard has now agreed to pay compensation and give a reference to the sacked whistleblower so long as he drops an industrial tribunal claim. Good to see public money in such scrupulously safe hands…

Court Circular

MARK BOLLAND's decision to give up his job as the £150,000 a year spinner for the Prince of Wales so he can set-up his own PR consultancy has left Lord Luce's plan for a centralised royal press office in tatters.

Luce, the lord chamberlain, had nurtured his plan with the increasing confidence that Bolland was the man to lead the venture, despite the Buckingham Palace old guard's dislike of his methods and distrust of his closeness to *News of the World* editor Rebekah Wade and PCC director Guy Black. Bolland's decision was communicated to Luce shortly after he received a memo inviting his comments on a revamped central media operation (*Eye* 1046).

Any hope of salvaging Luce's brainchild was dealt a further blow with the news that Charles is to retain Bolland's services in a private capacity for an estimated fee of, er, £150,000.

Senior flunkeys, who remain convinced that St James's Palace is involved in a conspiracy to undermine the Queen and other senior royals, feel they have been proved right and have been prancing down royal corridors hissing "I told you so". Luce may well be compelled to agree he got it wrong, albeit reluctantly, as confirmation of Bolland's departure arrived on the day Charles's private secretary, Stephen Lamport, Wade and Black all wrote – totally independently of each other, of course – to the *Daily Telegraph* complaining about its royal coverage.

Charles, having wrong-footed Luce (who faces a difficult meeting with Brenda to explain things this week), feels he is pretty unassailable at the moment. Determined to maintain his independence, he has consistently refused Luce's requests to take a high profile planning role for the golden jubilee, so as not to hamper his work with the Prince's Trust. Now he has exposed Buckingham Palace to the risk of sounding like trade union dinosaurs if they protest about the risks of having his spinning "outsourced" to someone not in the royal household.

It is slowly dawning on Buckingham Palace that it is not the St James's Palace machine which is "the enemy" – it's the heir to the throne himself.

'Flunkey'

"Oh, your mother rang – your father's died"

"I won't let members destroy the public services – that's our job"

EXAM UPDATE

EDEXCEL isn't the only incompetent British exam board as an embarrassing cock-up over GCSE results in Northern Ireland proved last summer.

By the last Friday in July, GCSE results were safely stored on the servers of the province's Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA). But by the following Monday nearly 1,000 of them had been changed. Or as the CCEA's chief executive Gavin Boyd put it: "It was not an accident. Someone, somewhere did something that they should not have done."

That "something" involved changing the results of the GCSE home economics exam just before they were released to schools and candidates: 831 students had their marks artificially raised by up to two grades, while an unlucky 133 had them reduced. The changes were abruptly reversed, producing tears from those adversely affected.

Though six months have now passed, 70 members of staff have been interviewed and assorted IT consultants have carried out four weeks of systems testing, the CCEA admitted last month that it was still unable to work out how the "secure" computer files were altered.

The hacking only came to light after schools realised that the grades their pupils had received were very different from those they'd expected. The likeliest explanation is that one of those sitting the exam – or a friend or parent – changed the marks and then altered all the others to hide the trail. Had they switched just a few results, nobody would probably ever have known.

BANKERS

A DYSLEXIC banker who won an employment tribunal against Abbey National, his former employer, on grounds of disability discrimination will shortly learn how much he will receive in damages.

At a private hearing on 25 January Robert Huskisson sought £500,000 for emotional distress and loss of earnings after he was mocked by his boss, who nicknamed him Trebor (Robert backwards). Huskisson, who was fired one month before the end of his 12-month probationary period for failing to meet his targets, argued that he should have been given a full year to improve his skills and that his disability should have been taken into account.

His case might be of particular interest to the Research Project on Dyslexia and Learning Difficulties at the University of Bath which was set up with a £100,000 grant from, er, Abbey National. The money was presented to Bath's new vice-chancellor, Professor Glynis Breakwell, by the university's chancellor, Lord Tugendhat, who also happens to be… chairman of the Abbey National bank.

CHESS NEWS

INVESTORS in the satellite TV company Einstein Group plc may not have been overjoyed to learn that their stakes are to be hugely diluted by the issue of more than 40 million new shares. Einstein's announcement, made half an hour after the stock exchange closed on 25 January, explained that the shares would be used to buy a company called International Leisure Ltd.

International Leisure was incorporated only one week earlier, on 18 January, by the chess impresario Raymond "The Penguin" Keene, apparently as a repository for the remaining assets of his company Brain Games plc, whose interesting business transactions have been chronicled in recent *Eyes*.

Its main asset is a contract with chess champion Vladimir Kramnik, who is due to play against the computer Deep Fritz in Bahrain later this year under the auspices of Brain Games – or perhaps now International Leisure, or indeed Einstein.

Einstein shareholders seeking enlightenment and reassurance from the company's website found instead a strange message to investors from chief executive Steve Timmins. "Following our original announcement of 22.11.01 concerning your company's intention to acquire Brain Games Network, you will have seen, and are likely to continue seeing, a variety of statements casting doubt on the propriety and legality of various of Brain Games' historic activities. Notwithstanding that, as far as we and our legal advisers and associated parties are aware, these allegations have yet to be substantiated. However, your company took the precaution of acquiring assets of the company through a subsidiary rather than the company itself in order to protect Einstein and its shareholders from any action or claim if any of these allegations are ever proven… Your company does not intend to react further to the repetitive and historic claims about Brain Games."

There are, however, one or two items of unfinished business for Brain Games' directors, including former Tory party chairman Sir Jeremy Hanley and Ray Keene. As we reported in *Eye* 1044, the company is still being pursued by fashionable London Club Home House over an unpaid £31,000 bill owed for two parties held at the time of the Kasparov-Kramnik match in October 2000. At a hearing last week, a judge ruled that Brain Games – which disputes its liability – could defend the action, but only if it pays more than £45,000 into court (to cover the party bill, plus legal costs) by 20 February. The reason for this precaution, he explained, was that Brain Games' assets had been "dissipated" and he was "mindful of the future".

All of which provides more business for Atlantic Law, the solicitors for Keene and Hanley, who have been firing off numerous indignant letters in recent weeks. Since Atlantic Law's writing paper doesn't refer to its partners (as it should under Law Society rules), we have only now discovered that the partner acting so forcefully for Brain Games is none other than Andrew "Tarzan" Greystoke.

Tarzan, a lawyer-turned-entrepreneur who was a Tory councillor in Westminster during the Shirley Porter era, is no stranger to *Eye* readers: for at least 15 years we have been chronicling the various corporate disasters with which he has been associated – Slater Walker America, Maddock, Bremar Holdings, Castle Mill and City & Westminster Financial, which sank in 1990 a mere six months after flotation. Shortly afterwards he resurfaced as chairman of yet another public company, Lanca.

By 1995 he owed more than £4m to creditors – including Lloyd's of London, which received a letter from Greystoke's psychiatrist pleading "mitigating circumstances". Also among the creditors was Jim Rowland-Jones, a businessman who had successfully sued him for libel. How delightful to learn that, only a few years later, Greystoke is himself now advising other "controversial" businessmen on how to protect themselves from defamation.

FTVE

Footballers' Wives (ITV)

WHERE would we all be without *Footballers' Wives*? What would we have to talk about? What would newspapers write about? What would TV critics fulminate about? What would the bourgeoisie all watch on Tuesday night? What would the programme's target audience continue to ignore in their millions?

A suitable indication of how badly the programme has failed in its primary intention came last Tuesday morning, when a leaked video still of sex on a snooker table, taken from that night's episode, mysteriously cropped up in the tabloids. That's leaked as in freely-issued-by-the-press-office, of course, because *Footballers' Wives* needs all the tabloid attention it can get. Only five million people are watching every episode, which would be great for a costume drama on BBC1 on Sunday night, but isn't enough for David Liddiment at ITV.

The chattering classes adore his increasingly camp stable of drama series – they hooted over *Bob And Rose* – but ITV's traditional audience don't want to know. For 40 years, according to legend, they kept the ITV button sellotaped down and wouldn't let the words "BBC2" be mentioned in the house. But now *Coronation Street* has gone down the pan, Barrymore is round the bend, *Peak Practice* is full of mad killer lesbians and *Millionaire* is on every day to fill the gaps. In this cultural wreckage, *Footballers' Wives* must be the last straw.

It's a shame, because it's a good idea. You don't expect TV drama departments, with their terror of good ideas, to commission something this potentially entertaining, and for ITV to do so, when there are more *Taggarts* and *Touch of Frosts* to be made, is little short of astounding. *Footballers' Wives* is completely of its time. The obsession with celebrity trivia, the incredible wealth of frequently dim sportsmen, the vague suspicion, increasing day by day,

"It's harsh reality TV"

that football's number may soon be up — these are issues that couldn't be more contemporary if they tried.

Moreover, it's well made. Despite some variable acting, *Footballers' Wives* emerges as an out-and-out romp, mixing crazed melodrama with some acute satire, and just about managing to keep its face straight. Last week's wedding between whispering Kyle and page-three model Chardonnay (née Carol) was a small masterpiece of kitsch, from the terrible clothes they wore to the fatuous vows they had clearly written themselves.

Poor Chardonnay, though, has had her breasts scarred in an accident, and is slowly going mad, where she will be joined by Tanya, wife of the team's captain Jase (né Jason). Thanks to this pair, the club chairman has been lying in a coma for several episodes: Tanya, racked with guilt, now toots cocaine every hour on the hour, while Jase has turned into a panto villain, spouting Alan Rickman-like lines at all opportunities and boffing someone's tarty sister in cars. Meanwhile Ian and Donna have been trying to reclaim the child they gave away for adoption 10 years ago. These are all appalling people – stupid, greedy, self-absorbed and rolling in cash. You wouldn't want to look like them, you wouldn't want to meet them, but you are happy to watch them every Tuesday night at 9 and confirm all your prejudices.

And this is the problem, for these aren't the prejudices of the target audience. Underlying *Footballers' Wives* are the assumptions that (a) football is silly, and (b) people who play football are sillier. If you are trying to appeal to the great football-loving public, as Liddiment keeps trying to, you couldn't do it more hamfistedly. Meanwhile, silent millions who hate football probably aren't watching it because they think it's about football.

Shed Productions also make *Bad Girls*, which ITV regards as a banker, and not just because that's rhyming slang for most of the show's viewers. *Footballers' Wives* is better made, less sleazy and not a fraction as popular. A good lesson for David Liddiment, or whoever succeeds him.

'Couch Potato'

DUMB BRITAIN

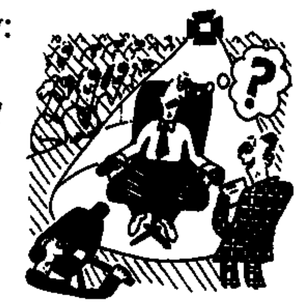
The Weakest Link, BBC1/2

Anne Robinson: The site of a famous battle in the English Civil War, the village of Naseby, is 20 miles south of which English city?

Contestant: Southampton.

AR: What is the highest prime number under ten?

Oxford research fellow: Eleven.



Chris Searle Show, BBC Radio Bristol

Searle: In which European country is Mount Etna?

Caller: Japan.

Searle: I did say which European country, so in case you didn't hear that, I can let you try again.

Caller: Er... Mexico?

Britain's Brainiest Footballer, ITV

Carol Vorderman: What is the medical name for navel?

Contestant: The abdomen.

DUMB AMERICA

The Tonight Show With Jay Leno

Leno: Who was the first man on the moon?

Contestant: Louis Armstrong.

(This week's answers: 1 Leicester. 2 Seven. 3 Italy. 4 Umbilicus. 5 Neil Armstrong.)

MEDIA NEWS

TO MARK the centenary of Marconi's historic wireless transmission across the Atlantic, BBC2 ran a special live programme from Poldhu in Cornwall where a signal was sent across the Atlantic to Newfoundland using a replica of the original transmitter, built by the Royal Navy's engineering training corps, Thunderer Squadron.

Viewers watched in awe as the BBC broadcast, the brainchild of BBC Plymouth news editor Roger Clark, showed a spark generated in Poldhu being picked up as a radio signal thousands of miles away across the ocean. Unfortunately this is not actually what happened.

Unlike Marconi, latter day radio buffs must make allowances for aircraft, mobile phones and microwave ovens, all of which could be severely affected by a super strong radio signal such as that used by the Italian inventor. For this reason, the spark generated by Thunderer Squadron on 12 December was diverted and sent across the Atlantic using more up to date methods.

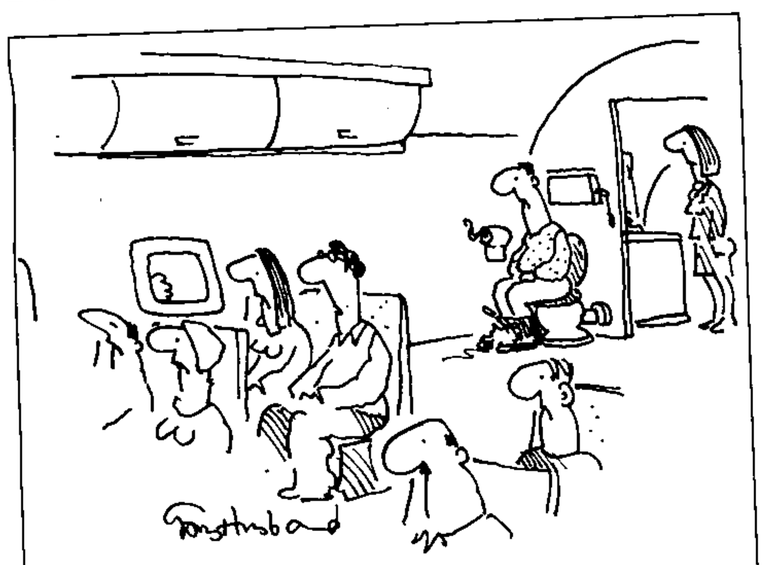
Clark insisted, though, that his programme would give the impression of an exact reenactment, much to the chagrin of the navy and local amateur radio enthusiasts.

GENERATION GAME
RATINGS HAVE NOSE DIVED...
AND THE SHOW FACES THE AXE...
BECAUSE THEY SAY VIEWERS ARE NO LONGER INTERESTED IN WATCHING PEOPLE ON IT...
ATTEMPTING TO DO THINGS THEY'RE NO GOOD AT
with Jim Davidson

HOW many people does it take to change a lightbulb at the BBC? Only one – but that someone has to be approved by the Beeb's property services people, Trillium.

When one worker asked if he could fetch a new bulb and stick it in the anglepoise lamp on his desk rather than wait weeks for someone to come and do it for him, this is the reply he received from Kate Smith, "facilities manager" for Land Securities Trillium.

"I am afraid that you cannot collect one and install it yourself. All electrical work on site has to be carried out by a trained electrician. If you want to install your own bulbs then you will need to produce a risk assessment to be approved by your departmental safety manager and by LST. This may sound bureaucratic but the systems are in place to ensure everyone's safety at work." Bureaucratic? Never!



"I sometimes think these no-frills airlines go too far"

IT'S time for yet another "strategic review" of BBC news and current affairs, this time commissioned by something called "Newsboard".

It's designed "to understand the role of BBC NCA in a context of fragmenting audiences" (not helped of course by Newsbored's own drive for yet more digital albatrosses). Despite endless promises from director general Greg Dyke to cut down on consultancies, yet another external company has been lavishly commissioned to carry out the review.

The company, Opinion Leader Research, boasts "an holistic approach to understanding a company's reputation... engaging and consulting with all key stakeholder audiences in an inclusive and empowering way."

And who are these "difficult to canvas" individuals? The BBC's *own staff*, it seems. Apparently the Beeb's internal communications are so pisspoor they have to hire an independent company these days to come in and survey a sample group of 50 of their own employees.

AT LAST the results of BBC Property's staff survey about "how to improve the look and feel of the workplace" are in. "Every idea will be responded to", is the promise; and already there are signs of "implementation".

They've refurbished the tea bar in Glasgow, redecorated a dressing room in Belfast, installed a drinks machine in Derby and planted daffodils at Elstree. Cost so far? £500,000.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Andy Warhol was very canny"
— Sunday, January 27, Channel 4

GMTV, BBC News and even Sky coughed up plenty of embarrassing clips showing their hacks in an unflattering light for ITV1's cut-and-paste show, *It Shouldn't Happen to a Reporter*. Yet ITN, ever under the thumb of ITV Network Centre, was only prepared to let one of its stars look like a prat: poor Mark Austin.

A young and gangly Austin was seen blundering into a lamp-post while trying to coax a soundbite from a runaway boy. In fact, he could not possibly look more hapless than he did during last year's execrable non-event, *Survivor*.

ITN insiders however wanted to know what happened to the really juicy out-takes, gleefully compiled onto staff-only "Christmas tapes". Apparently, the best clip of all shows a tantrum thrown by Mark Webster, a former Moscow correspondent, waiting to broadcast over a dodgy satellite link and screaming "fuck" so many times the foreign desk was forced to apologise to bosses at the European Broadcasting Union.

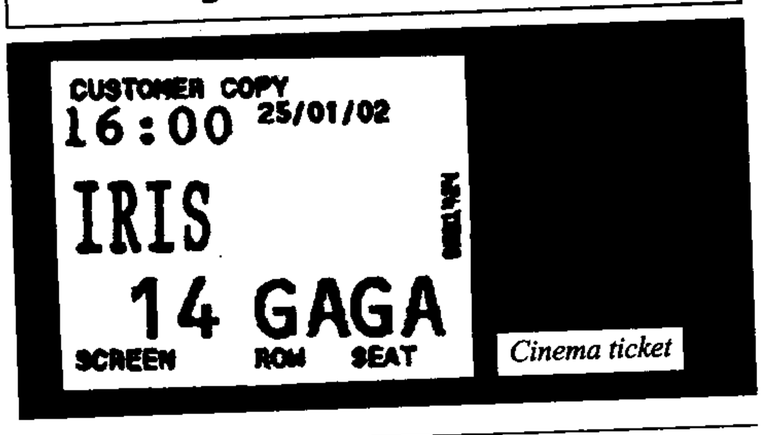
THE dire finances at ITN, which provides ITV's "News" at Ten, seem to be showing.

On 31 January, conveniently forgetting ITN's claim to a "reputation for reacting speedily to major news events", Dermot Murnaghan introduced reports on the Damilola trial, Consignia, the Hamilton's accuser, Lord Wakeham's Enron connection, deep vein thrombosis, the American hostage stand-off, German satanists, flood warnings and a funny about the Queen being delayed by a learner driver, all relying entirely on pre-recorded material.

SPLIT personalities

Bob Moore

Boy George Bush



Cinema ticket

Warballs

"It may be because we live in uncertain times, but we can't seem to get enough of tweed and tartan."

— Style column in *Guardian Weekend*.

"In the first week of June 1967… the top two positions in the UK album charts were nailed down by a pair of albums which dominated the musical landscape as absolutely as the World Trade Centre did the New York skyline before 11 September."

— Charles Shaar Murray on *Sergeant Pepper* and *Are You Experienced?*, February issue of *Guitarist* magazine.

"Once again the Blue Band Hotels are 'calling through' at the beginning of New Year wishing you a prosperous business year. Unfortunately, we are not able to provide you this year with our 'Blue Band Energy', the traditional glucose candy, [because of] actual world incidents. With best regards…"

— Letter from German hotel group to customers.

"No Finnish citizens were lost in the World Trade Centre tragedy. But some indirect links have been uncovered. It has come to light that one of the terrorists had applied for, and been denied, a visa to Finland last year."

— *Helsinki Happens*, Finnish airport magazine, gratefully finding a local angle at last.

"I guess it's one of those moments in history that will live in our memories forever. We'll all remember where we were when it happened. I, along with hundreds of others, was at the SOS 2001 exhibition in Birmingham…"

— Editorial in *Stationery Trade Review*.

"Traditionally, New Year's is a time of hope as we eagerly anticipate what lies ahead for ourselves and our loved ones. But this year, any celebration is tinged with the sad memory of 2001 and a date that will live with us forever: 11 September. Since that tragic day, we have grieved as a nation, we have comforted one another and we have reflected on what is most important in our lives… In this time of uncertainty, we've discovered that the relationship between our clients and their Financial Advisors has taken on added meaning."

— Editorial in *Investment Intelligence*.

LUVVIES

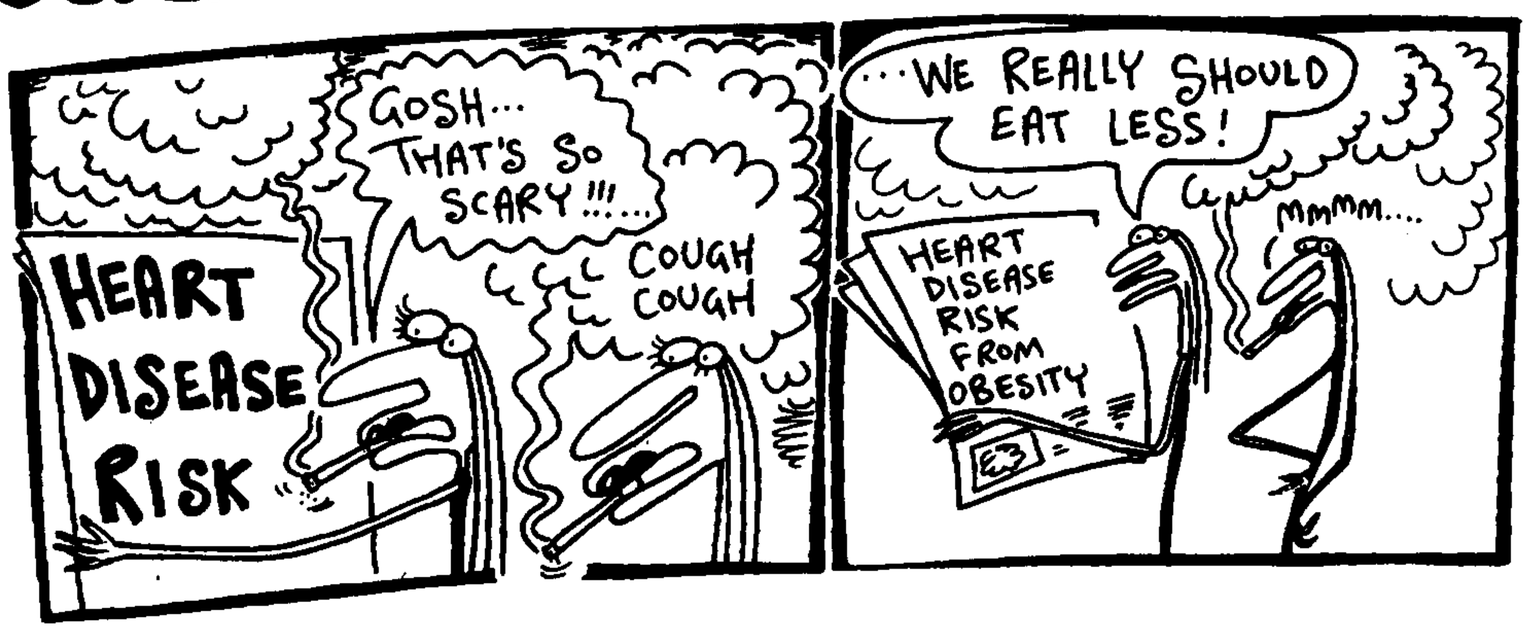
His reputation for taking risks precedes him. When he launched his early singing career in New York, he caused a stir by wearing a mask every time he performed. Why? 'I wanted to be known for my voice, not some cheap, outward manifestation such as, perhaps, my face.'

DAVID SOUL
Mail on Sunday

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER



DOING THE ROUNDS

Epilepsy and the NHS

THE investigation of consultant paediatrician Dr Andrew Holton by the General Medical Council following the alleged misdiagnosis and over-treatment of children with epilepsy at the Leicester Royal Infirmary should provide some indication as to whether the GMC has matured since the Bristol inquiry.

In 1998 the GMC nailed Bristol over two surgeons and a manager when, as predicted by M.D., the subsequent public inquiry found systemic failures at every level of the NHS. In retrospect, the GMC's initial impression that this was just a little local difficulty in Bristol looks laughable.

Dr Holton has already run the media gauntlet in our new "no blame" culture (*sic*) and he may well have made a number of errors. But his working environment was appalling. He was the sole consultant in neuro-developmental paediatrics and, as with the Bristol surgeons, spent many years asking for (and not receiving) more staff and resources. His waiting list, especially for EEG investigation, was ludicrously long and – as with just about every other doctor working in the NHS – there was no one monitoring his performance and no regular retraining. Although he was working alone, he was certainly not alone in having difficulty with the diagnosis of epilepsy. Across the UK, roughly one in five adults labelled with epilepsy and taking powerful medication for life don't have the disease. And of those who reach the (only) two super-specialist centres in Liverpool and London, the proportion is even higher.

As for the treatment of established epilepsy, studies in general practice have shown that many patients are not even seen once a year by their GPs, despite picking up repeat prescriptions, and more than 60 percent could have their treatment improved. So whatever the failings in Leicester, they represent the tip of a very unpleasant iceberg.

As ever in the NHS, the initial barrier to better care is manpower. Recent expert guidelines from the north-west region have recommended that everyone with a possible diagnosis of epilepsy should see a neurologist specialising in the illness within four weeks. The current average waiting time is 28 weeks, and many patients are still being treated by non-specialists and those with inadequate training. At the current level of consultant expansion, the target should be reached by, er, 2019.

A possible solution would be to train specialist GPs to work in community centres to screen all patients with "fits, faints and funny turns" (over half of whom don't have epilepsy); but this requires both resources and interest from GPs. Epilepsy is extremely stigmatising for patients but viewed by many doctors as dull and boring. None of the 20 specialist registrars currently doing the rounds through the Walton Centre for Neurology and Neurosurgery in Liverpool want to specialise in the disease; and most GPs aren't sure who their epileptic patients are and whether they really have epilepsy or not. The disease is just as common as diabetes, but receives a fraction of the media profile and funding because there are no celebrities willing to shout "I have seizures" from the rooftops.

The situation is particularly desperate in paediatrics, where epilepsy is very hard to diagnose and around a third of children with epilepsy also have learning difficulties such as autism. The need for counselling and support is huge, but rarely are patients followed into adulthood despite their increased risk of depression and suicide. Whether the GMC focuses on the big picture or a little local difficulty in Leicester remains to be seen. But as elsewhere in the NHS, changes will probably only occur through litigation. Only about a third of women on anti-epileptic medication are adequately counselled and informed about balancing the risks of the drugs and the risks of seizures to the unborn child. Now, a group of them have hired a lawyer and are suing the NHS for lack of informed consent. Queue the floodgates.

M.D.

Waiting time for inpatient treatment or surgery	41% within 13 weeks 33% over 5 months 7% over 12 months

Daily Telegraph

"Sorry, doctor, there's a waiting list "

SIGNAL FAILURES

To Arriva or not to Arriva

THE two-day strike by guards and station staff at Arriva Trains Northern (ATN) in late January had only a limited effect because management had left so few trains for the unions to cancel.

Many Yorkshire rail commuters are already used to travelling by bus because ATN doesn't employ enough train drivers. Since October ATN has been allowed to lose "an average of 1,000 services per week" from its rail timetable. Bus drivers working for ATN were unaffected by the recent strike so it was business on the buses as usual for many travellers.

The strike resulted indirectly from the government's determination not to be held responsible for the railways, even if that means its strategic rail authority (SRA) must bankroll parent group Arriva's cack-handed efforts at running a train company. ATN cancelled 16,289 services in Yorkshire in the first nine months of 2001. The West Yorkshire transport authority pleaded for the company's removal months ago (*Eye* 1037) but the SRA sat by as it cancelled thousands more trains.

Even worse, the SRA agreed last year to give ATN whatever subsidy it needs to stay afloat. As that rids ATN of its incentive to keep down costs, the rules of public accountability demand the SRA must now take a proactive role in the franchise.

But instead of being involved from the start in the negotiations over drivers' pay, the SRA waited until ATN had offered drivers a 17 percent pay rise. That left the SRA little choice but to fund the rise from public money.

The repercussions of ATN's deal with its drivers are only just being felt. ATN guards and station staff want parity – hence their recent strikes – and other franchisees will come under pressure to match ATN's offer too, with unions threatening strikes elsewhere. In addition, ATN's higher pay for drivers could leave other northern operators short of drivers and running buses for commuters instead.

THOUGH the government wants the public to believe it is not involved in the train strikes, the SRA is playing a major role in them by its lenient treatment of managers – not just at ATN but at South West Trains too.

The SRA has absolved SWT managers of blame for the strikes (low morale is not their fault, apparently) and chosen not to fine them for trains cancelled as a result of the strikes. This lessens the pressure on managers to negotiate to settle disputes.

The income lost in strikes is of course balanced by cost savings. No wonder Stagecoach, which owns SWT, is more interested in amassing a non-unionised substitute workforce for its subsidiary than going to arbitration with existing staff to settle the dispute. Even managers at Virgin Trains, half-owned by Stagecoach, have been trained as guards recently.

Now other train operators will expect the same treatment from the SRA and may feel under less pressure to avert strikes. Curiously, the far-reaching decision to let Stagecoach off the hook was not deemed important enough to be referred to the SRA board. It was taken by the executive directors including Richard Bowker, chairman and chief executive, whose links with Stagecoach were described in *Eye* 1045.

'Dr B. Ching'

DOWN ON THE FARM

WHEN Margaret Beckett took over Defra most farmers assumed she was just one more in the run of "joke" ministers of agriculture. But Beckett has proved to be beyond a joke.

Her speech to the recent Oxford Farming Conference was, like other speeches, a study in hypocrisy: an apparently sincere commitment to the national and global environment was followed by an equally profound love of agribusiness and global free trade.

Has she read any of the literature on the root cause of many of the world's environmental problems, eg agribusiness and global free trade? It seems her advisers have removed the key tomes from the bookshelf.

The obsession with liberalisation rests on a tragically simple error. Beckett believes that the produce of European farms is too expensive. But as any fule kno, the cost of food has virtually nothing to do with farmers. What consumers pay for in the supermarket is, by and large, not actually food: it is processing, packaging, haulage, retailing, advertising and, several times over, supermarket profit.

Farmers produce the equivalent of all our "indigenous type food" for a farmgate price of £12bn. Consumers though spend almost £60bn on buying food, £30bn eating elsewhere.

The "farmer value" in our food is literally pennies: a loaf of bread 4p; pint of milk 12p; pound of mince, 20p. These are relatively unprocessed foods, so it gets worse: breakfast cereals and frozen pizzas typically contain 2-5p worth of raw material. A year's supply of homegrown vegetables is bought from the farmer for just £17; the entire diet for just over £200 a head. The supermarket industry dwarfs farming; Tesco alone turns over more than the whole of agriculture. Do I really need to go on?

Yes, British food is expensive. Especially sugary wheatopops, frozen pizzas and oven-ready chips which verge on the shamefully extravagant. But this has everything to do with the rest of the food chain and nothing to do with farmers. UK consumers are actually spending the lowest percentage of income on food ever – less than 10 percent – and of that the lowest percentage ever is going to the farmers. Just how urgent can the need be to drive prices down further for them?

As for the subsidies that so "cripple" the British taxpayer, they amount to £54 per head per year.

'Gumboot'

I have been asked to point out that the cost for attending the Fasting & Prayer conference includes meals.

The Grapevine (Parish newsletter), Brixham

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

YET MOORE SPIN

STEPHEN BYERS' spin doctor Jo Moore is not only an expert at burying bad news. She also has a fearsome reputation for disposing of political opponents, particularly Trotskyists.

Sally Billot, a respected Labour councillor with 20 years' service in the London borough of Haringey, is by no means a Trot. Nevertheless, shortly before Christmas she was deselected as a candidate for next May's council elections. The meeting was packed with members from the South Hornsey Labour party, which Jo Moore chairs. Billot, 60, was mystified by her assassination, for which no explanation was given.

Her departure from the council will be a blow for those locals who have campaigned for an end, or at least a scaling-down, of the series of massive rock and pop concerts each summer in council-owned Finsbury Park — in particular the Irish Fleadh and the gay Mardi Gras, which attract tens of thousands of revellers.

The noise and litter are bad enough. More seriously, the heavy vehicles and equipment that set up and dismantle the events cause extensive long-term damage to the park's grass and paths. Cllr Billot has been a prominent opponent of the concerts, which are promoted by the Mean Fiddler organisation. The council is putting in a bid for £3m from the heritage lottery fund to restore the run-down park to its former Victorian glory. But supporters of the bid fear it will fail if the park continues to host regular massive gigs.

Another local resident who takes an interest in the future of the concerts is Paul Williamson, a former Haringey Labour councillor who made a packet a few years back when he sold his ticket agency business, Synchro Systems, to the US giant Ticketmaster, for whom he now works. Mean Fiddler has a close relationship with Ticketmaster, which provides ticketing for its events all over Britain.

By chance Williamsom happens to be Jo Moore's husband, which has prompted some unkind locals to put two and two together and come up with a ridiculous smear against Moore. Seems the poor woman is now more spinned against than spinning!

● **LEEDS city council's former principal youth officer Chris Hart has been jailed for 18 months for fraud.**

At Leeds crown court last month Hart, whose activities were first revealed in *Eye* 1002, pleaded guilty to conspiracy to defraud the council and to six charges of obtaining money by deception.

The court heard he had relieved local authority coffers of £32,658 by authorising payments for non-existent youth workers and non-existent goods.

Hart was widely regarded as a political bag carrier for his Labour party mentor George Mudie, the former council leader who is now MP for Leeds East (*Eyes passim*). The court heard that Hart, 40, recruited friends as money launderers. Council cheques would be paid into their accounts and they would withdraw most of the money in cash to pass back to Hart — keeping around 10 per cent for their trouble. Hart's barrister said his scams were merely unorthodox methods of reimbursement "to offset monies he had spent" in the course of his legitimate duties.

Sentencing him to 18 months for the conspiracy, plus concurrent sentences of nine months for each of the deception charges, Judge Scott Wolstenholme told Hart: "This kind of fraud is a fraud on the community as a whole." Meanwhile the cash-strapped council is cutting back its youth work on the crime-riddled streets of inner-city Leeds.

DAME SHAME

CROCODILE tears are flowing at Tory Westminster council following reports that former leader Dame Shirley Porter, now exiled in Israel, is down to her last few hundred grand, having mysteriously lost most of a fortune once estimated at nearly £70m.

The council has little chance, it seems, of recovering much of the whopping surcharge against her arising from the "homes for votes" scandal of the 1980s, which was set aside on appeal then reimposed last month by the House of Lords.

A council spokesman said last week: "We are still pressing for the amount the law lords determined was due — £26.4m plus interest at normal rates." Hmm. If only the council had "pressed" a bit harder before Dame Shirl scarpered to Tel Aviv. It's not as if Westminster can't zealously chase up debts when it wants to. In 1996 a Labour councillor "caught" photocopying press cuttings about Tory misdemeanours on a council machine had 97p docked from his member's allowance. The cost of "investigating" this heinous crime? £400!

DEAF EARS

THOUGH pop music is one of Britain's few thriving industries, Labour councillors in Tower Hamlets are about to force the closure of one of the country's few specialist schools for young people who aspire to work in the music industry.

The London Music School (LMS), a charity based in Wapping High Street since 1984, employs 15 full-time staff plus part-time tutors who run courses for up to 150 students a year. Subjects include singing, bass, drums, guitar, sound engineering and music technology. Last year half the students were British, with the rest from 23 countries including Cyprus, France, India, Israel, Italy, Korea, Latvia, Malaysia, Mexico and Turkey.

"Graduates" usually find work in the industry in Britain or their home countries. But the school's lease is running out and the freeholder, property developer Macleod and Fairbriar, wants to turn the former 19th century tea warehouse into 10 luxury flats.

Seventy-two objections have been received, including a 375-signature petition from locals, and the change from educational use even goes against the spirit of Tower Hamlets' own unitary development plan. Nevertheless the council is poised to grant change of use and give planning permission. If permission is granted the LMS will close because it cannot afford to relocate in London. But at least Docklands will get another vitally-needed block of expensive flats.

● **A BUFFET to mark Holocaust Memorial Day organised by Bristol's Labour council was remarkable for one thing – the absence of any representatives from the city's Jewish community. A formal complaint has been made to the council's sustainable development and social justice unit which organised the bash, demanding an apology. However, as distinctly non-kosher ham rolls featured prominently on the menu, Bristol's Jewish leaders might be glad they didn't attend the event after all.**

EDUCASHUN NEWZ

THE KING is dead... long live the king! No sooner had the reign of Terry and Nina Ashurst at Doncaster College (*Eyes passim*) drawn to a close after Nina was finally forced to pack her bags by her husband's successor, Dr George Holmes, than Terry's appointment as acting principal of troubled Stockport College was announced.

When Terry Ashurst sacked John Giddins, a union rep who had taught sociology at the college for 19 years, because he refused to sign up to a new contract, Giddins was told he could appeal to the head of personnel and clerk to the governors, er, that is to Mrs Ashurst. In 1999 Giddins won his case for unfair dismissal, but despite an assurance from Nina that she would resign, she somehow managed to cling to her post.

In August 2001 Terry was replaced by young Dr Holmes (previously pro-vice chancellor of the University of North London) who immediately announced a restructuring that would reduce 16 management posts to 10. The 16 managers who had to reapply for their posts included Nina Ashurst, who was unsuccessful. The college tried to find other work for the unlucky six, but in Nina's case to no avail; and on 21 December 2001 she cleared her desk, aided by Terry who complained bitterly about his wife's treatment.

Terry Ashurst is replacing Dick Evans at Stockport, one of the first four FE colleges to be inspected by Ofsted. The education watchdog now places more emphasis on leadership and management in its reports and Stockport's poor performance in these areas (deemed "weak" and "unsatisfactory") suggests the reason for Evans's departure. At least now Nina is unemployed she will be free to accompany her husband to South Manchester. Cynical observers have pointed out that the post of head of human resources currently being advertised at Stockport College would make an ideal job for Nina.

PS: *Plus ça change...* Dr Holmes's new deputy principal at Doncaster, Graham Hilton, has himself enjoyed some notorious press. In September 2000 it was reported that Hilton, assistant principal of Swansea College and a married father of two, had set up home with Carol Elliott, the estranged wife of the principal of Swansea College, Keith Elliott. A few months earlier Keith Elliott left his wife for Elaine Pope, also assistant principal at Swansea, and in a further twist to the saga Hilton's then wife, Jean, lectured at the college. Phew. No wonder he wanted to escape to Doncaster.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER

I'M NOT SURE WE SHOULD HAVE AGREED TO TAKE GIDEON TO THE FOOTBALL. IT'S AN ARENA NEITHER OF US IS COMFORTABLE IN
THE HURLING OF MISSILES THE BRUTISH CHANTING THE SENSE OF IMPENDING VIOLENCE
ARE YOU SURE YOU WOULDN'T LIKE TO GO TO TATE MODERN?
Scout Troop Under-7s Football Tournament

NOOKS and CORNERS

"SPRING is in the air," Fiona Reynolds, the new director-general of the National Trust, gushes to readers of the spring issue of the trust members' magazine as a prelude to introducing "details of our plans for an internal reorganisation." From which I conclude the top brass of the trust is ever so slightly rattled by the criticism this proposed reorganisation has received.

"The changes are mostly behind the scenes," Ms Reynolds explains, "and their aim is simple: to enable us to do our job even better. The Trust has grown very quickly in the last 30 years, and we now need to change our departmental structures so that we can continue to care for our marvellous buildings, coast and countryside to higher standards than ever."

The *National Trust Magazine* notes that the present management structure dates from 1968 when the trust had 177,000 members and 200 historic buildings in its care. Today it has some 300 buildings and 2.8 million members, so it does seem puzzling that it is proposed to cull the present 26 historic buildings representatives by 20 percent rather than employ more.

Fiona Reynolds
National Trust
Director-General

"The changes we are making will free staff from some of the internal bureaucracy that has grown up," purrs the Blairite Babe. So it is surely perverse to introduce a new management layer of "territory directors" (as well as a new "customer services directorate": sound familiar?) and to have some curatorial staff reporting to the regions, others to the new "territories".

"We are also bringing our central departments together under one roof, so that we can fully integrate the conservation of our built and countryside properties." But Reynolds neglects to explain why that roof has to be a new one and in Swindon, while she and a privileged few will remain in the capital.

When I first wrote about this bureaucratic threat to the poor old National Trust (*Eye* 1036), Ms Reynolds disingenuously misunderstood my article, denying that no more money would be going to historic buildings when I clearly meant no *additional* money. I now gather that there is to be a 5 percent increase in funding for the conservation department, but that the extra is all going to nature conservation.

It is surely sad that Fiona Reynolds is pushing ahead with plans she merely inherited before giving herself time to get to know the organisation she now ornaments. Perhaps, however, as a good Blairite she believes in continuous revolution. These people are presumably not dim. If you bring in management consultants to report on an organisation, they naturally conclude that more managers are needed.

Mere experts have been replaced by pseudo-efficient bureaucrats in the NHS, Railtrack, the BBC under John Birt and at English Heritage, which has been emasculated by knowledgeable historians being pushed around by managers and accountants. Now it is the National Trust's turn: what a shame those in charge can learn nothing from disasters elsewhere. No doubt Fiona will soon be proposing a new logo as those oak leaves give quite the wrong image in the 21st century.

Some change may well be necessary, but what is intolerable is that bureaucrats simply cannot comprehend that some people work for an organisation because they believe in it, or have acquired skills in which they take pride — whether they be railwaymen or art historians. So now we have the interesting phenomenon in Blairite Britain of tweedy corduroyed curators – natural conservatives – considering joining a union now they are threatened with having to reapply for their own jobs after years of loyal service. Some are just leaving as a culture of uncertainty and unhappiness has been created under the exciting new director-general.

There is one chink of hope, however. A letter has been sent to the National Trust expressing concern about the future of its collections and historic houses under the new management structure, for the trust has become the *de facto* custodian of what must be the largest national collection of works of art in the country scattered around its properties.

This letter seems to have been read by the director-general as it was signed by the directors of the National Gallery, the British Museum, the Tate and the Victoria & Albert Museum. So, faced by such big guns, the trust has belatedly decided to create a new post of director of historic properties who will be graciously allowed to have a seat on the new management board. Perhaps more concessions can be extracted.

Like her friends in Blair's government, Fiona Reynolds is acutely sensitive to (bad) publicity. There is even a letter from her in a recent issue of *Country Life* responding to a reader expressing concern about the National Trust's curatorial staff under the proposed changes. There is, she insists, "no question of the burden on these staff being increased." Yet it is a fact that, under the changes, their number is being *decreased*. So what is the truth? Perhaps the millions of National Trust members – so many, many more than belong to any political party – might like to ask what is really going on, and why.

'Piloti'

I-SPY *Sendai Station, Japan*

Submitted by Laura Taylor. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs. No transparencies.)*

FOOT & MOUTH SPECIAL

A CHILLING little episode in Devon has blown apart any last pretence that the three "pseudo-inquiries" set up by Tony Blair to whitewash his government's catastrophic mishandling of foot and mouth are, as claimed, "independent".

Businessman Dr Iain Anderson is the onetime Downing Street apparatchik appointed by the Beloved Leader to chair the so-called "lessons learned" inquiry, looking into the political handling of the crisis. Stung by criticism that his inquiry, like the others, was only hearing evidence behind closed doors, Anderson finally plucked up the courage to hold a public meeting on 23 January with some of those involved in the crisis. He opened the meeting at a hall in Okehampton packed with farmers and local vets, by announcing that he was indeed politically independent.

Several vets asked why, when they came across cases of infection, had they had to wait up to 24 hours for Maffia officials in Page Street, London, to permit them to slaughter. This defied all experience and scientific sense, which dictated that animals should be killed as soon as disease was identified, to prevent spread.

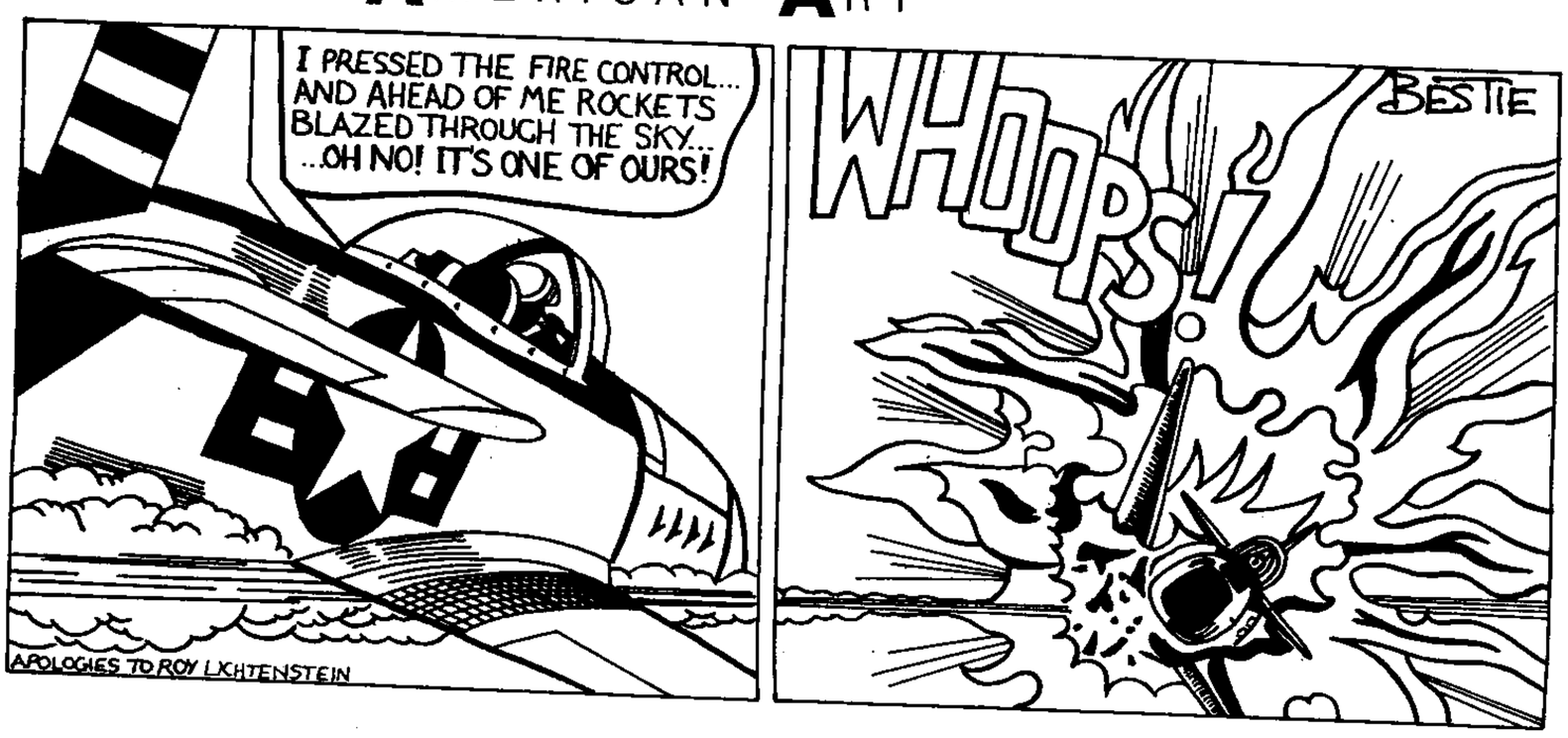
Anderson asked whether anyone could explain the rationale behind the new policy. A farmer pointed out that there was someone in the audience peculiarly well qualified to answer. Sitting at the back was Tim Render, a senior Defra official, who

at the time of the crisis was regional operations director for Somerset and is now Defra's chief gauleiter in the south-west.

When Mr Render sat tight-lipped, the inquiry secretary Alun Evans intervened to say he would not press for an answer [why not?] and moved on to the next question. When the meeting was over, Anderson was to be driven back to Gloucester in a coach furnished like a railway carriage, with seats facing over a table. Several farmers were then astonished to see the senior Defra official and the supposedly independent inquiry chairman sitting down opposite each other, preparing to engage in cosy chat during the two-hour journey.

'Muckspreader'

MODERN AMERICAN ART


I PRESSED THE FIRE CONTROL... AND AHEAD OF ME ROCKETS BLAZED THROUGH THE SKY... ...OH NO! IT'S ONE OF OURS!
WHOOPS!
BESTIE
APOLOGIES TO ROY LICHTENSTEIN

A spokesman for Chelmsford Borough Council said certain roads are not lit 'because they are rural roads'. When asked how a road gets the 'rural classification' – we were told 'a road gets the rural classification because it is not lit'.

Chelmsford Yellow Advertiser

Letters

String 'em up

Sir,

Re: Eye 1046 cover, "US Prisoners Shock". Regarding the treatment of the kneeling figures in red clothing. It is not a pleasant sight. However, these prisoners are not Al-Qaeda "foot-soldiers". They are leaders and trainers of that obscene organisation. And to a man, they loathe and despise every last thing the Geneva convention – and western civilisation – stand for.

These kneeling figures – obviously alive if not very comfortable – are fortunate. Al-Qaeda recently paid several million US dollars to religious terrorist gangsters in Chechnya for the beheading of four British telecommunications engineers kidnapped and held captive by them. This religion-motivated obscenity was carried out on each individual captive in turn while the remaining victims watched helplessly.

*So, when you take the piss out of the American servicemen guarding these foul people, be thankful it was not one of **your** loved ones executed by Osama bin Laden's money-hungry Chechnyan co-believers. Or else it might have made you take a somewhat less stomach-heaving, politically correct attitude to these men's present incarceration.*

I believe the American government has made a mistake in the open incarceration of these men. They should have been handed over to the Northern Alliance; every last man jack of them, including the three "British" prisoners.

I.D. METCALFE,

Bristol.

Edexcel dunces

Sir,

Re: Edexcel. We all by now know of the incompetency of this pathetic exam board. However, the problems that this exam board have caused have not just been in the exam papers they have issued. The real problem that should be highlighted – which is more likely to affect the outcome of a person's grade – is the quality of their workbooks.

I myself am a year 13 pupil studying A level maths. I as well as my fellow students and my teachers have found countless mistakes in the books issued by the exam board. These mistakes range from the wrong answers being printed, faulty questions (like that on the exam papers), and worst of all incorrect equations.

JENNIE FISHER,

Via email.

Sir,

Thought you might be interested to know that the FD of Edexcel is a Mr Steven Mullarkey!!

Kind regards,
MR SAUL PARRY,

Via e-mail.

Muck raking

Sir,

*Re: Silence of animal rights campaigners over FMD: Down on the Farm, 25 January. It is not remotely a "mystery" why there was "silence of the animal rights brigade" during the FMD crisis. It is dead simple. None of the media wanted to hear what we had to say. God knows we tried to voice our concerns but we can't **force** the media to print our letters, read our press releases, report our campaigns and demos, allow us on radio phone-ins and TV programmes. This allows columnists like Muckspreader to pontificate over our lack of action on FMD – the proverbial Catch 22!*

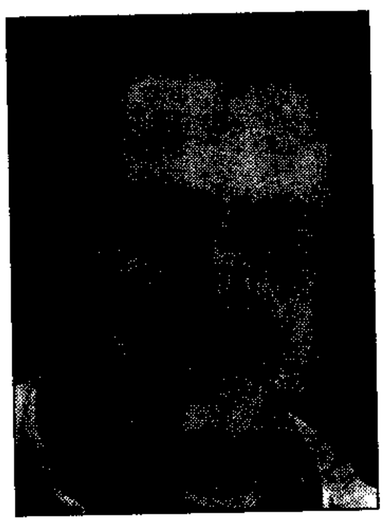
Mind you, I wonder what Muckspreader would have had us do to get publicity? Stand naked in a field with placards screaming abuse at MAFF officials? Sure this might have got us noticed but frankly I can't see how it would have stopped the "cull" to "save" the animals. In fact it would have given the animal rights-hating pundits another chance to vilify us for "deliberately" wanting to spread the FMD virus.

*Anyway, what would we animal rights campaigners have been "saving" these animals from? Certainly not death; these animals would normally have been part of the regular consignment of the **600,000** sheep, pigs and cattle, along with the **15 million** poultry, sent to British slaughterhouses **each week**. While the media and public gnashed their teeth and wept as they watched in horror the FMD crisis unfold on TV, where did they think their lamb chop and beef sarnie were coming from? I'll tell you: from the untelevised and hidden holocaust of 900 millions animals sent annually to be strung up by their back leg and have their throats cut by desensitised men on piece rate in the slaughterhouse.*

Yours sincerely,
SARA STARKEY,

Tonbridge, Kent.

Lookalike



Lord Mayor

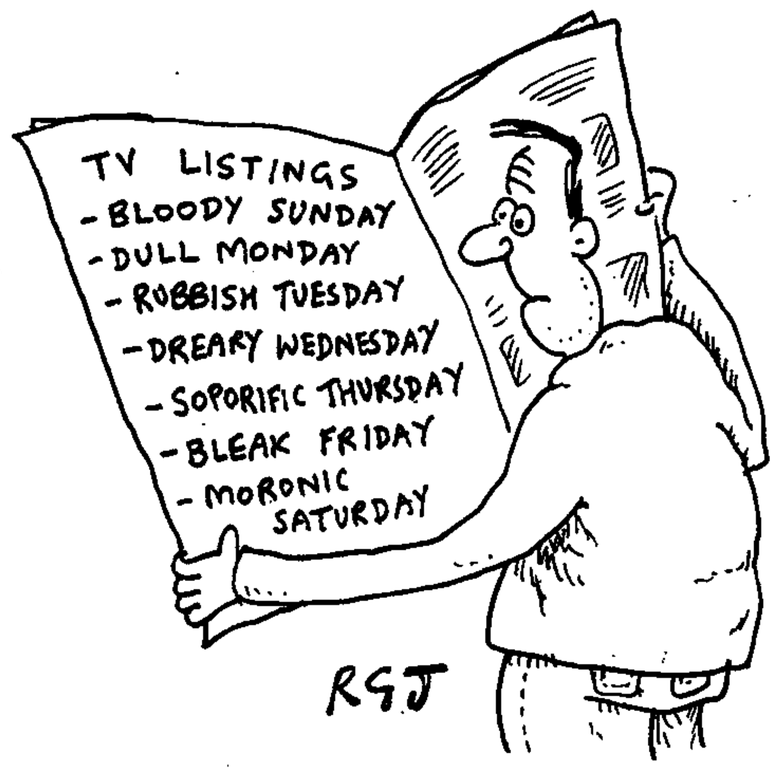
Loo cleaner

Sir,

Please find enclosed a photo of award-winning, Oxford loo cleaner Mr Dennis Denton, who looks remarkably like Ken Livingston, Mayor of London.

Yours faithfully,
C.R. GODDARD,

Banbury, Oxfordshire.



Those bloody programmes

Sir,

I write to congratulate Square Eyes on his excellent analysis of the two recent docu-dramas concerning events in Londonderry in 1972.

He is right to voice concern about the corrosive effect these programmes will have on younger American viewers. Indeed, I am concerned impressionable viewers the world over, who do not take the Telegraph, will have been given an entirely misleading impression of so-called Bloody Sunday. I myself gave strict instructions to my good lady wife and our servants not to watch either programme. As Square Eyes astutely observes, Jimmy McGovern is both Catholic and emotional and therefore we must conclude, entirely incapable of a reasoned response to the murder of 13 unarmed civilians by an elite regiment of the British Army. Clearly what is required here is a cool, unemotional and non-Catholic response as exemplified by, er, the late Lord Widgery.

I am sir, yours,
CROPPY LIE DOWN,

Little-Barking-Bigot-on-Sea,
Somewhere in the Dark Ages.

Sir,

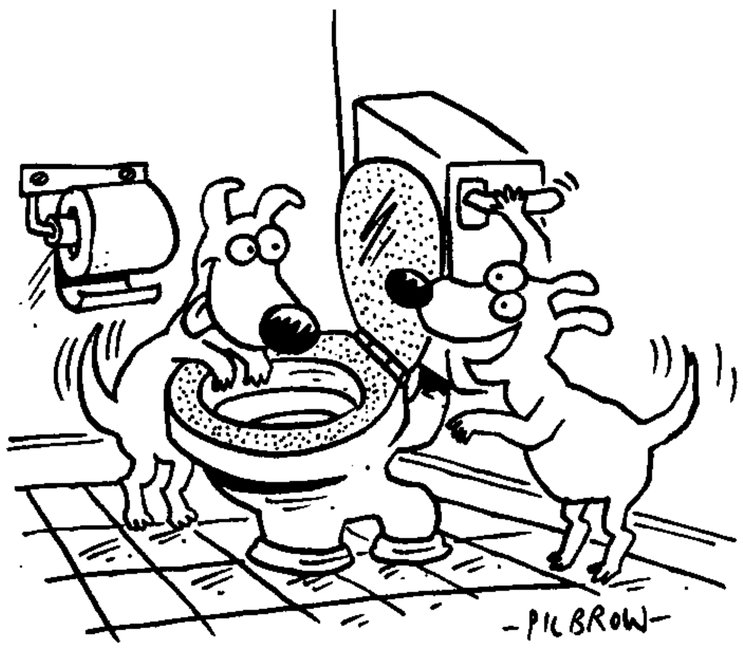
Please tell Square Eyes to get his facts right. The British Army first went into Northern Ireland to protect Catholics from the bigots in the RUC and B Specials (RIP) who colluded in burning Catholics out of their homes and beating up civil rights marchers – remember Burntollet Bridge?

Catholics, seeking the protection afforded by a neutral Army, welcomed the British Army with open arms and cups of tea – hardly the actions of people threatening nationalist terror. Sadly the situation was made progressively worse by successive British governments, who demonstrably couldn't manage a piss-up in a brewery.

Square Eyes was right in other respects however, both programs were bollocks.

BRIAN McCABE,

East Sheen, SW14.



"Still or sparkling?"

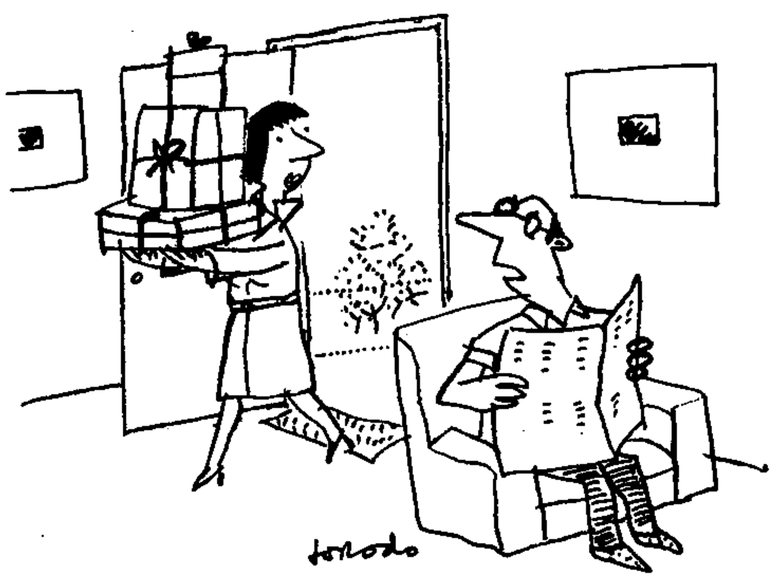
Taking Liberties

Sir,

With 53 MPs and close on 20 percent of the popular vote, isn't it time the hoary old joke about the size of the Liberal party (unfunny photo caption, Jan 25) was pensioned off? With six MPs and a 5 percent poll rating, equivalent quips about assemblies in telephone kiosks were legitimate and mildly amusing 50 years ago, but surely a year into the new millennium you can think of a more original and entertaining way of sending up my revered leader's belated "road to the aisle" (Geddit?).

Yours faithfully,
BOB HEYS (60 years a Liberal/LibDem),

Rippenden, Halifax.



*"Yes, but do we have to keep up with the **Zeta** Joneses?"*

Football and Mouth

Sir,

As an Eye reader of some 15 years I have become well used to your snobbish, patronising attitude to this country's national sport, but Piloti's article on the redevelopment of Arsenal's Highbury Stadium (Eye 1046) was the most condescending, ill-informed piece of crap I have ever had the misfortune to read.

Piloti's comments on the Beautiful Game ("Culturally-sanctioned mayhem... brutish noise... violence, vomit and intimidating, fascist baying") show that, if he has ever been to a football stadium at all, it was clearly many, many years ago. Had he bothered to do more than five minutes of research he would have discovered that Arsenal's crowd is largely made up of well-heeled season ticket holders and is thus one of the most placid and well-behaved in the country.

His dismissal of the listed building status of Highbury's splendid 1930s art deco stands as "a pathetic sop to proletarian 'culture'" is not only offensive, it is also utterly ignorant. It may indeed be true that more people visit museums and galleries than attend football matches, but it is equally true that more people visit football stadia than visit the obscure rural churches that Piloti usually rambles on about at great length, and stadia, as public buildings, are no less worthy of protection and admiration. Piloti's architectural knowledge would be much improved by visiting magnificent structures such as Barcelona's Camp Nou, Paris's Stade de France or Milan's San Siro.

As for his absurd claim that football stadia are "increasingly used for pop concerts", to my knowledge no English league ground has hosted a pop concert since Oasis played at Maine Road in 1995. But as Piloti is clearly an expert on the matter, I'm sure he'll be delighted to correct me. Obviously, as one of the vomiting proles who threaten all that Piloti holds dear, I don't have a clue what I'm talking about, but I'm intelligent enough never to buy your sneering public school rag mag again.

TIM RUSSELL,
London W6.

"Philippe's Restaurant? Could you send someone to Table 14?"

Sir,

Piloti's article on the proposed new Arsenal Stadium at Ashburton Grove was extraordinarily one-sided and ill-informed. The suggestion was given that the plans had only been considered in a brief council meeting, and that it was only at that time that members of the public could present their objections. In fact, as with all planning permission considerations, the plans were available for some time and Arsenal had consulted extensively with residents, companies and other interested parties in order to find an amicable solution. He states that objectors were given "just three minutes each" to present their case, as if it were a scandal of insidious censorship. This is normal policy at public meetings where there are many interested parties in attendance, and objections were received and considered well before the final meeting.

The suggestion that the Piccadilly Line will be unable to cope with the huge influx of extra supporters is spurious. Before Highbury became all-seated 10 years ago, the capacity was 56,000. The capacity of the new stadium will be 60,000. The tube network can surely cope today with the same volume that it could 10 years ago, bearing in mind that extra trains are put on by LU on match days. The idea that there will be extra cars is also unlikely - few supporters arrive by car, particularly as the stadium is within walking distance of four tube stations. The suggestion is also given that midweek games are a new and insidious development, which shows evident ignorance by Piloti. There have been midweek cup and league games for years.

The idea that companies based in Ashburton Grove have in some way been frog-marched off the site is also far from the truth. Arsenal has gained much praise from companies who have been assisted in finding alternative locations, without which the planning permission would not have been granted.

Yours sincerely,
PHIL MARSDEN,
London W9.

RENEWAL OF WEDDING VOWELS
This is a new service that we can offer to couples, via the Registry Office, Kentish Weddings.

Leaflet, Folkestone

Sir,

Re: Football and Mouth. Your last "Nooks and Corners" seriously, and justifiably, criticised Arsenal Football Club's plans for its new stadium and fund-raising developments at Drayton Park, London N7. The community and businesses, which will be affected by this scheme, have been protesting over the past 18 months against these plans but local newspapers are directly sponsored by AFC and the dailies have been fearful of reprisals believing there would be a drought of communication from AFC's press office, depriving their sports readers of their daily football fodder, if they deigned to find fault with the club's tactics.

*Seventy-five per cent of Islington's residents voted **against** AFC's plans (council's own survey), the population of Islington will increase by one third every time there is a match or full-house, non-football event. There's still little evidence of how 60,000 fans can safely evacuate the site right next to the A1, Holloway Road; there's even less evidence of how 30 percent of them are going to fit on to the Piccadilly Line; over **80** businesses will need to be "evicted or extinguished" to make room for their **one** business and there's a pittance on the table to help them.*

I have personally been offered £25k to surrender my leasehold title worth 16.5 years to me when my turnover is circa 750k pa and AFC would move me and my 14 employees to "Spurs" territory because, after Islington council has permanently released 65,000 square metres of industrial space to Arsenal's developers (the biggest industrial space in Islington), there is nowhere suitable left in the borough to relocate us.

So what does the community get in return? Oh, there's the "state-of-the-art" waste recycling facility, known locally as the "council tip" to be placed in the middle of a residential area... There's the alleged 2,300 jobs to be created to replace the 2,500 already in existence in Ashburton Grove (when less than 1,000 can be accounted for and most of them are part-time stewarding jobs) and... yes, of course, there's the high density housing in which many rooms are just twice the size of the cells given to the Afghan detainees in Cuba much criticised by the rest of the world!

Byers: it's all "spin" – call it in!

JOHN ROBERTSON,
Model Solutions, London N7.

Pedants corner

Sir,

Re: Wissenschaft. "Brussels Sprouts" has a far better knowledge of academic German than Daniel Bell (this page 23 Jan), for "Wissenschaft" is not a synonym for "science", nor is it used in the same way.

Difficult to translate, as it has no direct English equivalent, "Wissenschaft" means something like "the knowledge and techniques necessary in a particular subject area (or academic discipline)". Hence "wisdom" while not a completely adequate translation, is not too far off. "Science" is of course "Wissenschaft" – which has no doubt misled Mr Bell – but so is every other academic discipline.

Yours sincerely,
MICHAEL C. JONES,
Harrow, Middx.

Sir,

Your highly amusing "Daily Tudorgraph" chronicling the scandalous exploits of Prince Hal was anachronistically titled. Hal (later Henry V) was a Plantagenet and died 63 years before the Tudors took the throne.

Yours,
JESS CULLY (BA Upper Second Class Honours, Medieval and Modern History, University of London).
London E11.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"I need protecting... I mean, who's gonna protect me if he bites me in the ring?"
LENNOX LEWIS, BBC
(Martin Jefferson)

"That was the way to nail the record to the mast..."
GLENN HODDLE, BBC Online
(Ollie Doward)

"This is something we just can't ever forget; and to be here helps me to remember."
Visitor to WTC, New York, BBC TV News
(John Beynon)

"We want a draw or as close as we can get to one."
Berwick Rangers fan, BBC News
(Ann Eldridge)

"Aston Villa are seventh in the League – that's almost as high as you can get without being one of the top six."
IAN PAYNE, Radio 5 Live
(Stuart Szymanski)

HOM SAP

AUSTIN

Letter from **Kabul**
from Our Own Correspondent

WHILE Afghan and British forces stop cars in Kabul searching for hidden arms, far more weapons are being illegally stored in the capital with no attempt to hide them.

They belong to the Northern Alliance, whose "police" now patrol with British paratroopers of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Under the agreement reached in Bonn before Christmas, neither the forces nor the arms should be here. The agreement said all militias should withdraw from the capital. But the Northern Alliance interpreted this as meaning "the streets" of Kabul. So any number of heavy weapons, including tanks, can be kept there as long as they are not actually on the road.

The international team, led by the British commander of ISAF, Major General John McCall, which concluded the agreement with the interim Afghan government, has accepted this Alice in Wonderland interpretation. In every stage of the tortuous negotiations they had been outmanoeuvred by the supposedly unsophisticated Alliance leaders, and the hamstrung multinational presence here is a far cry from what was envisaged at Bonn.

Instead of guns gradually disappearing from our society, more and more are being acquired by the most dangerous of men who are using them against each other. One of the busiest purchasers is Abdul Sayyaf, a fundamentalist with Saudi money whose killers carried out some of the worst atrocities in the past. Sayyaf is nominally allied with the Northern Alliance but has been kept out of the interim government. He now lurks in Kabul and his powerbase, the adjoining province of Paghman, supposedly in secret negotiations with renegade Taliban.

Down south in Kandahar the local warlord Gul Agha Shirzai does not even bother to keep his negotiations with the Taliban secret. Shirzai has taken millions from the gullible Americans for allegedly bribing tribal leaders and Taliban commanders to hand over Osama bin Laden and Mullah Mohammed Omar. Even US officials began to smell a rat though when Shirzai allowed the one-eyed mullah to escape when he was supposedly surrounded, and then followed this by freeing seven senior Taliban instead of handing them to the Americans. But the US can hardly ask for its money back, much of which has already been spent buying arms with the help of Pakistani ISI agents.

There is arming and recruiting throughout the country. In the north the Uzbek warlord General Abdul Rashid Dostum has been made deputy defence minister by the interim leader, Hamid Karzai; but in reality his power rests with his 25,000 militia based around Mazar-I-Sharif, recently reequipped by the Russians and Turks. In the west Ismail Khan, the "emir of Herat", is receiving aid and arms from his fellow Shia Iranians. While in the east Haji Qadir, the new governor of Jalalabad, has no shortage of funds from the opium fields he has secured.

Mr Karzai's writ does not run much beyond Kabul, and is tenuous even here. He is sharing the Presidential Palace with the former president, the Islamic scholar Burhanuddin Rabbani, who shows no sign of moving out.

Mr Karzai sees ISAF as the army he needs; hence his demand, repeated in London last week, that the multinational force should be increased and deployed through the country. But it would be suicidal for ISAF to do so, and even Tony Blair, who has seen his grandiose declarations of British deployment so embarrassingly delayed because the Northern Alliance and the US flatly refused him permission, will give up Britain's lead role in ISAF after three months. It will fall to the Turks.

The US, having presided over the disintegration of Afghanistan, will soon move its war against terrorism elsewhere. So far it has spent $27m a day on war and less than $1m in total for reconstruction. Various nations pledged large sums at Tokyo, of course, but as we Afghans have discovered there is a long way between the pledging and the receiving.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

o "We don't want to interfere in the Parsi religion," Jangoo Gagrat told a meeting of the Disposal of the Dead with Dignity Action Group in Bombay, "but Parsis have to face facts. The population of the Indian vulture has declined drastically over the past few decades, and nowadays the Towers of Silence are full of decaying corpses, most of them barely eaten. And that clearly constitutes a major public health hazard."

But speaking on behalf of Bombay's 55,000 Parsis, high priest Dastur Nadershah Unvalla refused to consider other forms of disposal. "The scriptures say it is a heinous sin to bury or cremate the dead. Ever since the eighth century, we have been disposing of our dead by placing them atop one of our Towers of Silence, and letting the vultures strip the bones bare. It's true that Parsis in Europe and America bury their dead, but that is a disgrace. They are not following the true teachings of Zoroaster, and I look down upon them."

However, Gagrat's action group is agitating for a change in Indian law. "The government seems unaware that the city's biggest collection of biomedical waste comes from these towers, because eventually even the Parsi priests cannot stand the stench of rotting flesh, and ask the authorities to take away the putrefying remains in specially blessed plastic wheely-bins. Other religions have had to modify their ancient funeral rites, in response to urbanisation. Hindus, for example, are often prosecuted for throwing half-burnt corpses into the river. At present, the Parsis are legally exempt, but they really have to make a decision soon. Either accept some form of cremation, or else start breeding vultures." *(Borneo Bulletin, 8/12/01. Spotter: Jonathan Brind)*

— o —

o *"We know it's unorthodox, but we do it to avoid problems with gangsters," a post office executive told reporters in Kyoto. "Several years ago, a post office in Osaka had trouble with a group of gangsters, over a postcard that had become soiled in transit. It was unpleasant for everybody, particularly for the postal worker who made the error, since he had his eye burnt out with a hot poker. So after the incident, we decided to introduce a special service for them, to make sure it didn't happen again."*

The unnamed executive was explaining why post offices throughout Japan have for years been giving preferential treatment to mail sent by Japanese gangsters. "Their mail is easy to spot, because the envelopes bear the kanji character for violence, written in red ink. And there is usually an instruction on it too - 'please open quickly and sort' - also in red ink. When our employees see this, they carefully put the letter or card into a special packet used for correspondence between post offices, to make sure it arrives quickly and in immaculate condition. The gangsters only pay postage for normal delivery, but we offer this special service to them because it prevents friction. The messages are often important, you see, telling someone that they are going to be expelled or have their head chopped off, so it is essential that they arrive on time, and in pristine condition." (Yomiuri Shimbun, 23/12/01. Spotter: Russell James Taylor)

— o —

o Bin Laden's Terrorist champs

Agassaim Villagers soccer

PANJIM: (HSD) – Bin Laden's Terrorist, Agassaim, defeated Our Lady of Gloria, Agassaim, 3-1 to win Agassaim Villagers eight-a-side soccer tournament, on Greenfield grounds, Agassaim.

Bin Laden's Terrorist played attacking soccer right from the word go and shot into the

lead Benny, who headed home a John cross.

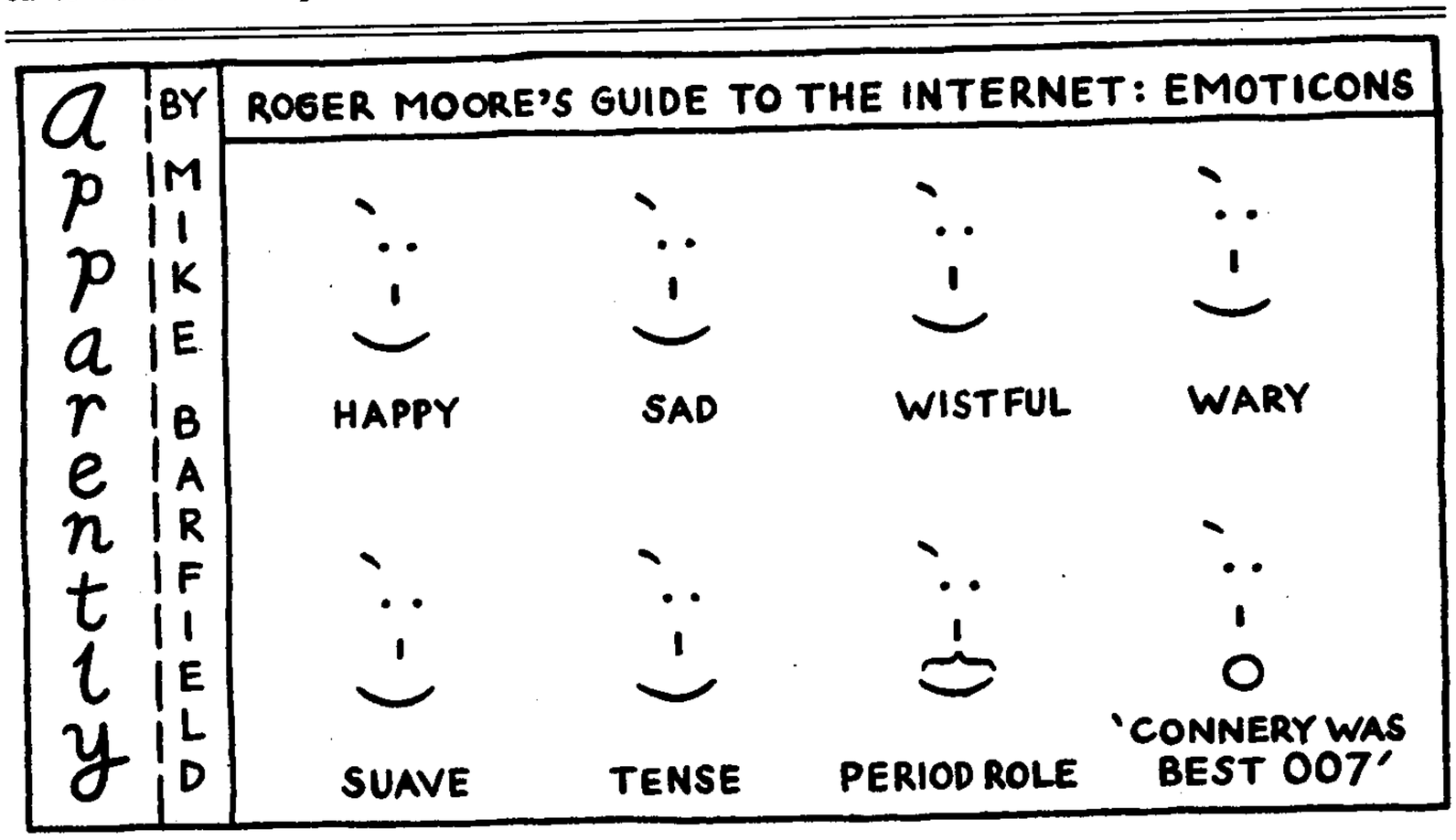
They increased their tally through Manuel.

They further consolidated their position through the boots of Camilo.

Gloria finally managed to reduce margin through Melvin.

Francisco Silveira, MLA, was the chief guest and gave away the prizes to the winners.

Following individual prizes were awarded: Best goalkeeper – David Fernandes of Bin Laden's Terrorist; Best defender – Joao Afonso of Our Lady of Gloria. Best forward – Benny Fernandes of Bin Laden's Terrorist. *(The Panjim Herald, Goa. Spotter: Geoff Bush)*



ST ANDERSEN'S PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo!

And the first thing I want to get straight with everyone this week is all that silly parish gossip about the PCC and a certain local gas showroom run by Mr Enron Hubbard.

There is no truth whatever in all these allegations that Mr Enron was given the contract to convert the church heating system from oil to gas only because he had treated the PCC to dinner at our local Thai restaurant, the Bakhanda.

Look, there's no secret about this. He did take us out to dinner, which was very generous of him. And, yes, shortly afterwards we did give him the contract.

But there was no connection between these two events, the going out to dinner and the new heating system.

The fact is that lots of people are kind enough to take members of the PCC out to dinner – Mr Ecclestone, Mr Hinduja, Mr Robinson, and many others. And it doesn't mean anything. They're not expecting any favours in return.

So let's have no more of this hurtful and pointless tittle-tattle, when we've all got much more important things to think about, like what we are to do with the church heating system which has unfortunately broken down.

And while I am on the subject of carping criticism, let me also get something else straight.

I have been accused of taking the side of our local cottage hospital doctors against a poor old lady, Mrs Addis, who had been left on a trolley covered in blood for three days.

Goodness me, nothing could be further from the truth! It's not the vicar's job to take sides, and certainly not to back our highly professional and dedicated doctors against a sad, confused, unpleasant, racist old woman!

Surely the message is that we all want better treatment for our old people. But we

also want better treatment for doctors!

How do you think Our Lord would have reacted all those years ago, if he had been subjected to the kind of racist and ungrateful behaviour that we have seen recently?

There might have been some very different Bible stories for our kids to learn about in Sunday School! (See below.)

Yours,

Tony

Kiddies' Korner

INSPIRING STORIES FOR CHILDREN

FROM THE ACCENTURE BIBLE

Our Lord was looking around for some sick people to make better, because he had a lot of healing skills and was very good at interacting with the general public. And there was a man lying down, who was "sick of the palsy". "I've been lying here for three days," he complained, "and no one is paying any attention to me. I'm going to get my son to ring up the newspapers." And Our Lord said, "I'm sorry, no miracles for you today, my friend," and rightly went on his way.

© Rev. T. Blair 2002.

Parish Postbag

Dear Sir,

I would like to make utilisation of your columns to deny catatonically all suggestions that my retiral is eminent. This is just idle and malodious tottle-tittle and I wish to nail it on the head once and for

Yours sincerely,

J. Prescott, Working Men's Club.

The Editor reserves the right to shorten all letters denying rumours started by himself, and also not to correct the grammar and spelling of any letters which might reflect badly on the correspondent in question. A.C.

A FORMAL WARNING TO ALL PARISHIONERS

From Mrs Cherie Booth QC

I hereby give notice to all my husband's parishioners that anyone who discusses any aspect of the private life of Child E (ie, our son Euan) and in particular his plans for higher education at a college run by my friend Mr Beloff QC, President of College T at the University of O, or hereinafter suggesting undue influence, cronyism or the alleged "pulling of strings" to secure the aforesaid Child E a place at the aforesaid College T in the University of O, shall forthwith be issued with proceedings under the Human Rights 1999, with particular reference to S.51, The Rights To Privacy Of The Families Of Very Important People, and should know that this is an offence punishable by a term of not less than five years' imprisonment in Guantanamo Bay.

Signed, C. Booth,
Matrix Chambers,
Hugefee Road.

Notice

■ Whilst the Vicar is performing vital missionary work in darkest Africa, the normal arrangements as to his stand-in will apply. There will be no stand-in, as we all now accept that the Vicar is irreplaceable and anyone acting for him would be a pale shadow who might mess everything up. (No offence, John!) T.B.

'Welcome!' to our Afghan visitor Mr Khazi in his colourful native dress! The stylish Mr Khazi certainly went down a bomb with the ladies of the parish! The Vicar and Mr Khazi meanwhile had some very fruitful and interesting talks with a wide exchange of views, except obviously on the subject of Afghanistan where they agreed to differ! The Vicar says, however, that Mr Khazi has very nice manners and speaks English much better than Mr Prescott. (No offence, John! T.B.)

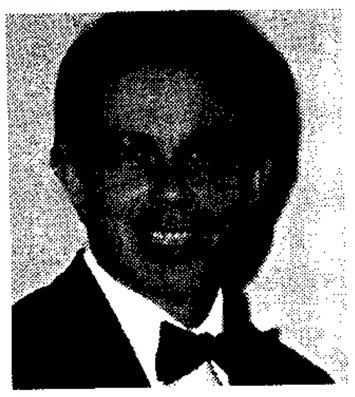
FLOP IDOL REACHES CLIMAX

by Our TV Staff **Jimmy Youngpeople**

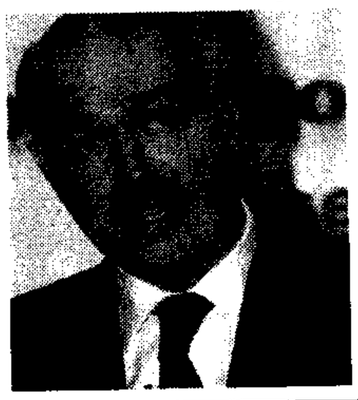
IT'S the show that has the nation gripped, as every week desperate wannabes vie to be the nation's favourite politician.

Now it's down to just two candidates after the voters ditched ultra-confident Charlie Kennedy, the comeback king, whom they said would never make it.

This week it's a straight fight between the stammering, spluttering Iain Duncan Smith, with his funny hairstyle, and the middle-class heart-throb with the charming smile, Tony Blair.



Tony

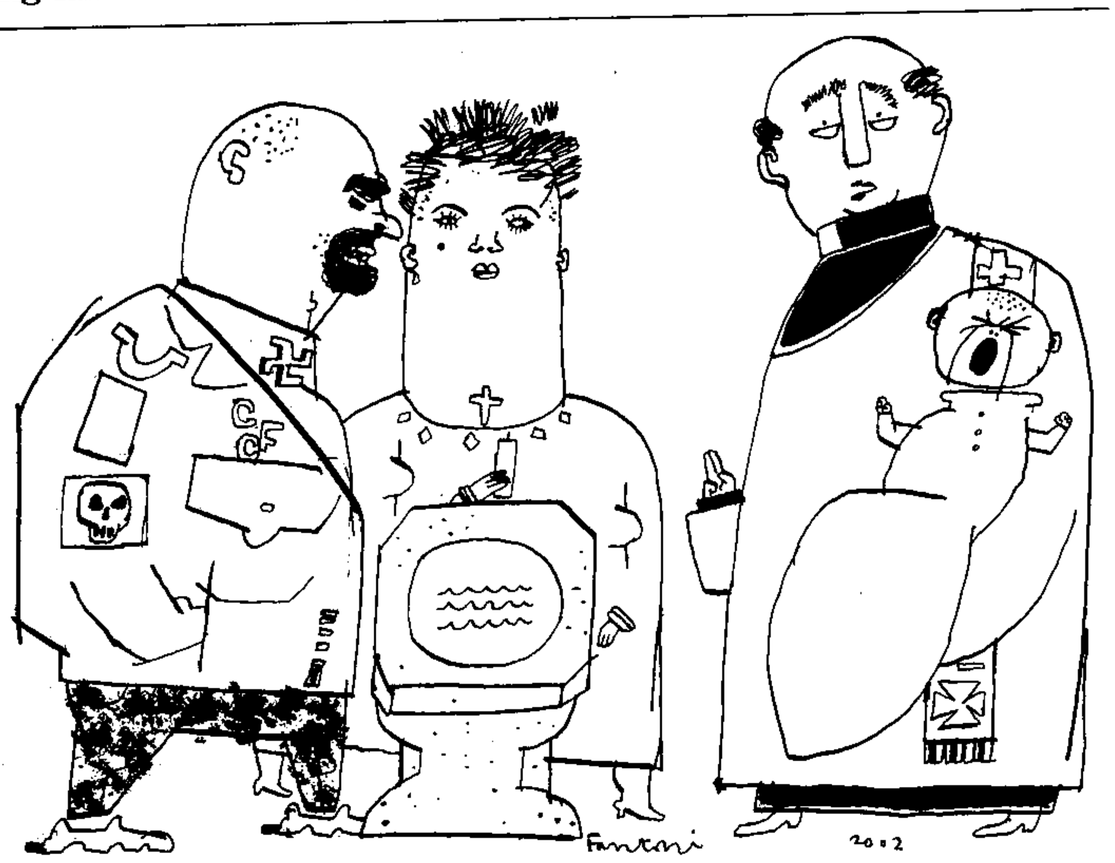


Iain

Only one of the plucky pair will end up at Number Ten – and it won't be Iain!

On tomorrow's programme Tony will have to sing "My Way" and Iain will have to sing "Goodbyeeee".

Don't miss it and don't miss your chance to vote.



"I baptise you Child B"

GNOME GARDEN ORNAMENTS

Your chance to own this magnificent stone statuette of the greatest woman of the Twentieth Century.

NOW Gnome Garden Ornaments of Weston-Super-Mare offers you a unique opportunity to acquire this all-weather marble masterpiece, guaranteed to frighten away unwanted wildlife. Birds, squirrels, foxes, Jehovah's Witnesses, will all run a mile when they see this life-size replica of the world's most terrifying woman.

● *Says Art expert, BRIAN R. SEWELL, "Isn't it too, too frightful for words, my dears, or is that me?"*

News in Brief

GREEKS IN DESPERATE PLEA

by Our Cultural Staff **E.L. Gin**

"Please don't send us the Thatcher Marble," begged the Greek minister for culture last night. "We can't bear to have *(cont'd. p. 94)*

STARS FLOCK TO ANDY ARSHOL PARTY

by **Alastair Campbell's Soup**

YES! They were all there. The icons of the Sixties that you hoped you would never see again.

And they were all gathered at the Tat Modern Gallery in London to celebrate the world's greatest artist Andy Arshol.

Guests who partied late into the night, dancing to the cult Sixties band "The Who Cares", included:

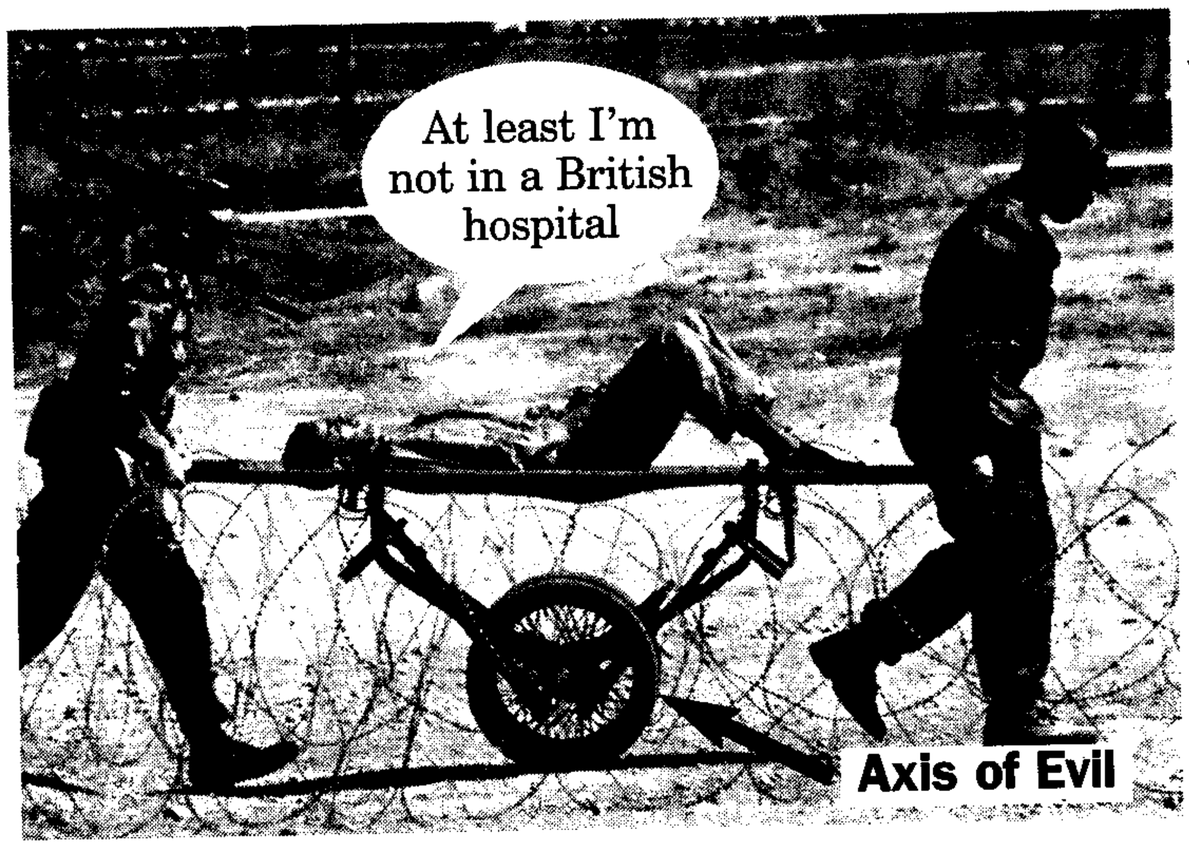
- **Marianne Unfaithfull**
- **Nicky Hasbeen**
- **Brian Ono**
- **Salman Washdup**

And a host of other people you can't remember.

Said the Tat Modern supremo Sir Nicholas Arsota, "This party symbolises exactly what Andy Arshol meant as an artist. You don't want to be here for more than 15 minutes."

What You Will See

- **Picture of Baked Bean tin**
- **Picture of Marilyn Monroe coloured yellow**
- **Er... that's it.**



Axis of Evil

That Edexcel Exam Paper In Full

GCSE BIOLOGY

Candidates must answer 7 of the following 4 questions. Write on all three sides of the paper. You have 2½ seconds.

1. Explain the difference between the following parts of the human body:

a) The arse

b) The elbow

4. If you were unable to answer question one, would you like a job at Edexcel?

SEX SHAME OF WOMAN WHO PREYED ON SCHOOL KIDS

by Our Man In Court
Arthur Daley-Mail

A LONDON woman, Miss "Filthy" Dacre, was today accused of hanging around outside schools, offering money for sex stories.

The court heard how three boys accepted sums of up to £5,000 each, to give "oral sexual testimony" to Miss Dacre, for her to print in her tabloid newspaper, the *Daily Mail*.

Nigel Dempster

Said prosecuting counsel, "This

is a disgraceful story. Miss Dacre enticed these young, innocent men into committing obscene acts of 'journalism', with no regard for her professional position, solely to feed the depraved appetites of her readers."

The case continues.

What You Didn't Hear

The Today Programme

Sue McGhastly *(for it is she)*: ... thank you, John. It's 7.43, and we move on to the controversial topic of 'Kiss And Tell' memoirs. Should the private secrets of the pillow be peddled for profit? In the studio we have broadcaster Sue MacGregor, who has just published her life story, *My Naughtie, Naughtie Nights*...

Sue MacGregor *(for it is also she)*: ... that's right, Sue. It's available in all good bookshops...

McGhastly: It's all very well to make a joke of it, Miss MacGregor, but a lot of people have been very upset by your account of sleeping with the married actor Leonard Rossiter. How on earth can you justify putting all that in?

MacGregor: Well, I was under a lot of pressure from my publisher. He said 300 pages describing how I drank coffee out of plastic cups with John Humphrys and Brian Redhead wasn't going to sell any copies...

McGhastly: ...yes, well, that's as may be, but...

MacGregor: ...no, let me finish. He asked me if I could think of anything to spice it up a

bit, so that they could sell the serialisation to the *Daily Mail*.

McGhastly: So you're admitting that you just betrayed these confidences for money? And the widow, Mrs Rossiter, apparently knew nothing about it. Is that right?

MacGregor: Well, that's a very crude way of putting it, but...

McGhastly: ... so it's true? Some people might say that you were just an unscrupulous, greedy, shameless old scrubber. How do you respond to that? And I must ask you to be brief, since we've only got two seconds left, which are now up.

MacGregor: ... er...

McGhastly: Sorry, that's all we've got time for. And now it's time for Thought For The Day, with Mr Rodney Spruce, who is Reader in Satanic Studies at the University of Melton Mowbray (formerly the Institute of Mechanically Recovered Meat).

Mr Spruce: When I heard the news from India of England's victory in the latest one-day cricket match, I couldn't help feeling, as I am sure all my fellow Satanists did, that life is rather like that, and...

(Continued on 94 KHz)

MARIO TESTINO PORTRAITS
NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY
HAVE YOU NOTICED HOW HER BREASTS FOLLOW YOU AROUND THE ROOM?
HE SHOULD CHANGE HIS NAME TO TESTOSTERONE
I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE SOME UGLY PEOPLE
YOU NOT LOOKIN' AT MY BIRD?
HE'S THE DIAMOND GEEZER OF HAPPY SNAPS
TOILETS
FEELING FLABBY AND FRUMPY?
EXIT
DR BONES PLASTIC SURGEON RING 12377611
I WONDER IF HE HAS TO ASK THEM TO SAY FAT FREE CHEESE?
HEATH

BUSH DECLARES WAR ON ENRONIA

by Our Diplomatic Staff **N. Ron Hubbard**

White House, Tuesday

IN HIS State of the Onion address last night, the President of the United States declared war on "an evil regime that is threatening to destabilise the American government".

Mr Bush described the Enron leadership as "a fanatical group of folks hell bent on bringing down the entire American caboodle".

He accused them of "terrorising him" and "launching a suicidal assault on my administration".

THE ENRON IS NIGH

Critics of the President have pointed out that it was the U.S. Government which originally backed the Enron movement and its fundamentally greedy leaders. They argue that the close links with the U.S. Government were to blame for the creation of the Enron/Ar-Thuranderson network in the first place.

But the President was unmoved. He declared all-out war on Enronia and ordered B-52 bombers in to destroy all documents linking him to the scandal.

The British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, last night said that he "stood shoulder to shoulder with the President up to his neck in it."

THAT SPEECH IN FULL

Happy Christmas to y'all! Today we face an axis of evil stretching across the galaxy, an evil empire led by Darth Bin Vader and his Comanches, intent on destroying our American way of life, our hot dog stands, our apple pie and our Kentucky Fried McMuffins. So who are they, these evil countries?

I have a list of them in front of me right here. Iran, Iraq, Iroquois, North Korea, North Dakota, North by North West, Northern Ireland, the lost city of Atlantis and El Dorado...

(At this point, Mr Bush was injected with anti-pretzel serum, rendering him temporarily conscious.)

God bless Enronia!

Your Cut Out 'n' Keep Guide To The Queen's Round-Britain Golden Jubilee Tour

May 1 The Queen will open the School of Contemporary Cake-making in Dundee.

May 4 The Queen will visit the new set of traffic lights in Nuneaton High Street.

May 21 The Queen will attend a performance of line-dancing given by pupils of the Abergavenny Junior School.

May 28 The Queen will open a new car-park at the Civic Centre, Keynsham.

May 30 The Queen will visit the Highland Moth Museum in Pitlochry.

June 4 The Queen will lay the foundation stone for the new Vodaphone warehouse at the Business Park.

June 14 The Queen will attend a luncheon for senior citizens at the McDonald's Restaurant, Chorleywood.

June 23 The Queen will "cut the first sod" of the A7598 extension to the Morpeth by-pass, Northumberland.

July 6 The Queen will take a tram ride on the new Wakefield Metrolink.

July 14 The Queen will unveil a plaque to mark the birthplace of Ronnie Corbett in Potters Bar.

July 20 The Queen will be mugged on a visit to Brixton in South London, and will have her mobile telephone removed. *(Surely some mistake? Ed.)*

POST OFFICE UNVEILS SHOCK PLAN FOR FUTURE

by Our Postal Staff **Gavin Second-Class Stamp**

THE directors of the world's oldest postal service, known since 1840 as the Royal Mail, today announced a 6-point plan to bring it into the 21st century.

1. Change to new silly name, such as Accenture, Insignia or Sellafield.

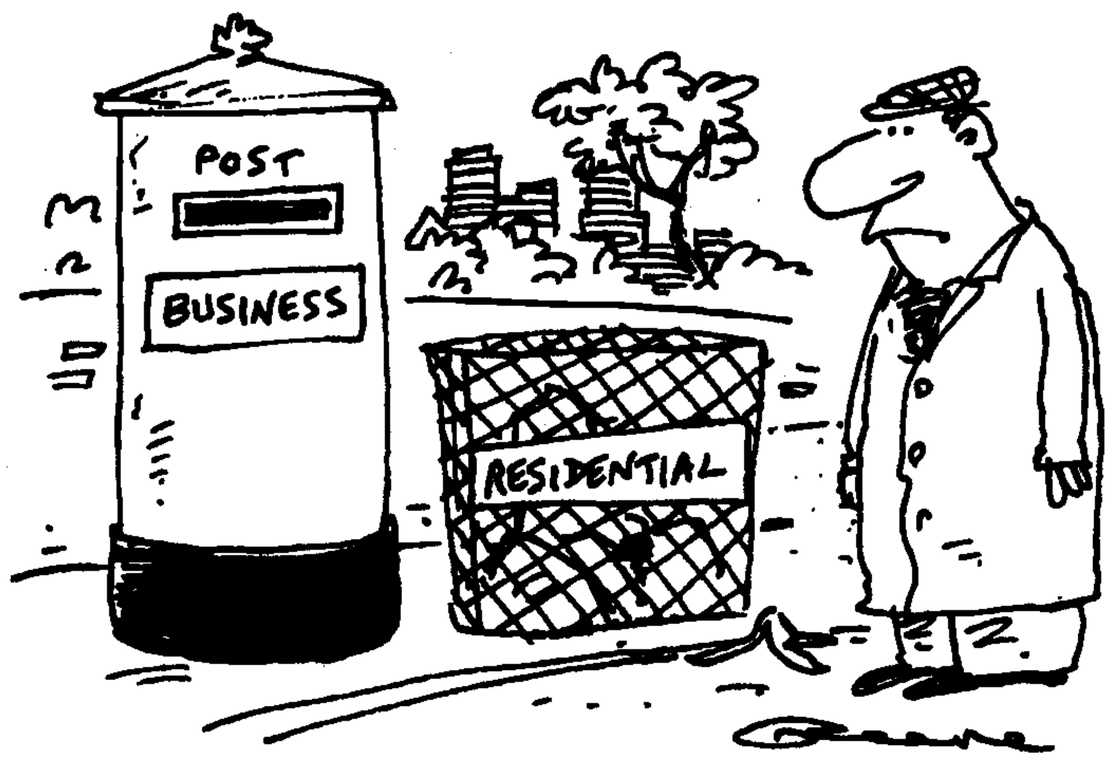
2. Sell off all profitable parts of service to private enterprise.

3. Close down thousands of post offices.

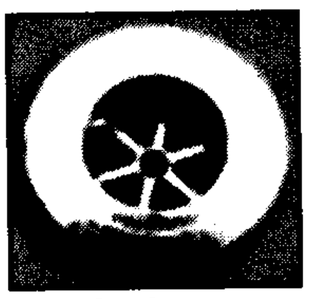
4. Look surprised when you don't make any money.

5. Sack all remaining employees.

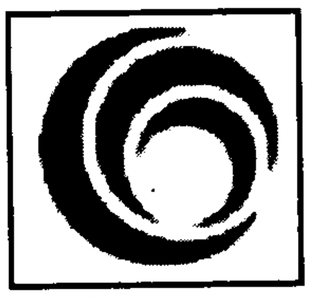
6. Advise old people to collect their pensions via e-mail.



SPOT THE DIFFERENCE



Consignia



Plughole

GREAT PHILOSOPHERS OF HISTORY

No. 94 Scrutonides

SCRUTONIDES, whose school briefly flourished in the late 20th century, held that the highest good could only be attained by those who were dedicated to the pure pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, unsullied by any material consideration such as receiving money from commercial organisations. His celebrated axiom "Fumo ergo sum" ("I smoke therefore I am very rich") was much-quoted until Scrutonides was revealed as a charlatan who had himself received payment from tobacco companies. He retired and spent his declining years in a barrel.

What You Won't Be Listening To

BBC Radio 3

World Music Season – Sounds From The Tundra.
Continuing our week of contemporary Inuit music, including:

6.10 The Symphonic Suite *Laplandia* by Igloo Igloony, played by the brass section of the Neasden Sinfonietta, with Oliver Pritchett (solo banjo).

6.51 Song Cycle: *Auroria Borealis* by Borealis Johannson, sung by Conradi Black (baritone).

7.25 Darkness at Noon, a tone poem for percussion and moose by Pingu, performed by the Nova Scotia Radio Symphony Orchestra, conductor Sir Vernon Tablet.

7.46 Symphony No. 167 *The Frozen Geyser* by Rudolfo Reindeeri, performed by the Musica Antiqua di Inverness, conducted by Ishiguro Satsuma.

8.30 Nanook Newman sings *The Icicle Cantata* by Anorak

9.10 Interval Talk *Posh And Becks*, the Iconography of Modern Culture by Marina Warner.

9.30-midnight Inuit-Jazz Fusion with Sled.

TOMORROW: New Music From Turkmenistan.

GLENDA LEE-SLAGG

THE QUEEN OF FLEET STREET

■ **THE ROYAL JUBILEE – Aren't-chasickofit? It hasn't even started yet and already we're fed up to the back teeth with the Queen this, the Queen that and the Queen the other thing. No offence, ma'am!??!?**

Can't people think of anything else to fill their columns with?!!

We're not interested, OK??!

Lissen, it's 2002, for chrissake, not nineteen hundred and fifty whatever *(subs, please check)!?!*

Street parties went out in the Middle Ages, when people had nothing better to entertain them!!

Now we've got EastEnders, Play Station 2 and Sky telly all night long!?!

Golden Jubilee?!!? Forgeddit, ma'am. Why don't you just spend the day at home with hubby, and send for a Chinese?!!?!!

'Cos that's what the rest of us will be doing!!!!

■ THE GOLDEN Jubilee! At last something to give us back our pride in Britain!!?!?!

Our trains may be late?!? Our hospitals may be filthy!?! Our schools may be full of kids knifing each other for their mobile phones!?!?!

But our monarchy is still the envy of the world!??!?!

That's why, come the day, I'll be first into the street with my paper hat and my Union Jack, a-bawlin' out God Save The Queen at the top of my voice!!!?!!

Just for one day it'll be like being carried back to the good old days before our trains were late, our hospitals were filthy and *(You've done this one. Ed.)*

■ *DIDN'T you shed a tear when you heard the news that glamorous granny Germaine Greer is packing her bags and going back down under to the land of Oz?!?!?!*

Say what you like, she changed our lives with that fabulous book 'The Fear of Flying' (check title, sub)*!!??*

She gave us gals dignity!?! She gave us a voice?!? She gave us freedom to burn our bras and take over the world from men!?!?!?!

God bless you, ma'am, as you sail back home after 50 glorious years!!!!?!

■ **GERMAINE GREER?!?! So she's going back to the land of kangaroos and boomerangs!!!!?**

Who cares!?!?! I say, good riddance!! We've all had a bellyful of this garrulous granny, a-moanin' and a-groanin' on the telly when everyone's gone to bed!!?!

Clear off, and take your burned bras with you!!?!

No one remembers those books you used to write back in the Middle Ages!??!

We'd all rather watch EastEnders and send out for a Chinese??!

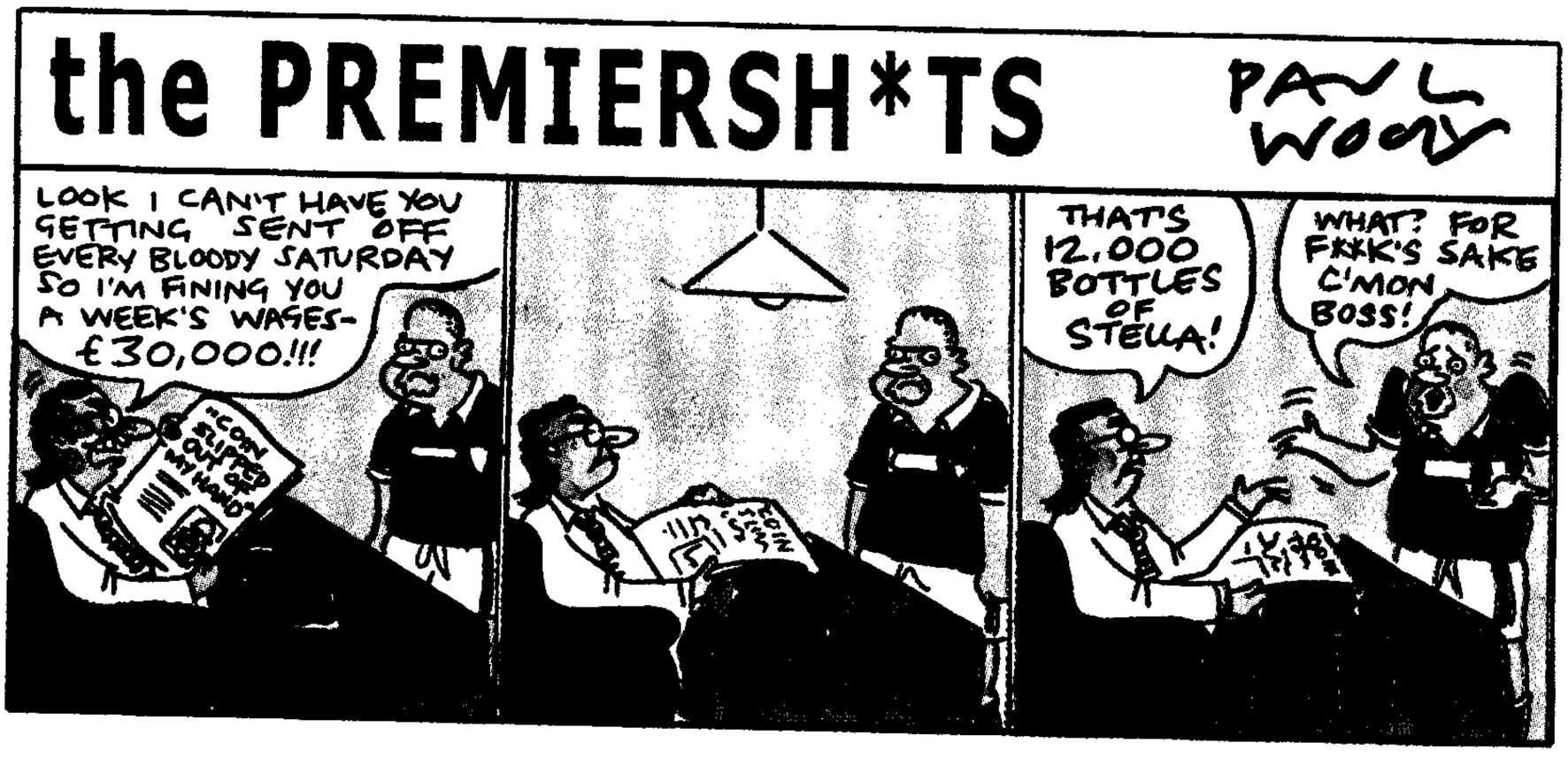
HERE they are, Glenda's Viagra Valentinos!!

● **Lord Wakeham** – you can "wakeham" me up in the middle of the night and I won't complain to the Press Council??!?!

● **Donald Rumsfeld** – mmm!!!?! You can chain me up any time, and you don't have to give me a Koran??!?!

● **Ole Gunnar Solskjaer** – crazy name, crazy goalscorer!!!!

Byeeee!!!


the PREMIERSH*TS
PAUL WOOLEY
LOOK I CAN'T HAVE YOU GETTING SENT OFF EVERY BLOODY SATURDAY SO I'M FINING YOU A WEEK'S WAGES- £30,000!!!
THAT'S 12,000 BOTTLES OF STELLA!
WHAT? FOR FKKK'S SAKE C'MON BOSS!

Tyson 'Behaviour Unacceptable'

THE Nevada State Athletic Commission has voted not to renew Mike Tyson's licence following his press conference brawl with Lennox Lewis.

"Tyson's behaviour was appalling and his actions brought the game of boxing into disrepute," said the commission chairman.

"How dare he start a fight somewhere where people can watch it for free." *(Reuters)*

LATE NEWS

'Wobbly Government' Put To Test

NEW LABOUR's chief architects have insisted that their "wobbly Government" has been fixed.

Unveiled in a fanfare in 1997, the Government proved to be extremely wobbly when Bernie Ecclestone and the Hinduja brothers started to walk all over it, but now recent extreme tests have proved the problem has been reduced.

"The fact we've now had a whole American Multinational walking all over us without our opinion poll ratings crashing spectacularly to the ground," said a delighted Number 10 spokesman, "is a true testament to the underlying strength of the foundations of this edifice."

Tories Attack 'Shocking State of IDS'

THE horrendous problems facing Britain's IDS were revealed today when the Conservatives highlighted the shocking case of a frail, confused-looking, middle-aged man, Iain Duncan Smith, a politician they claim was wrongly diagnosed on a number of occasions by the British public as suffering from "Hagueitis" – a debilitating condition that renders the sufferer impotent outside the House of Commons and totally unelectable.

"Despite desperately and repeatedly crying out for attention since he was transferred to the leadership, IDS has been totally neglected by the voters," complained one senior Tory, "but it was only by covering his hands in the blood of Rose Addis that the tragic plight of IDS was finally able to get some much needed coverage in the tabloids.

"Many people think Britain will never have a decent IDS, and frankly I'm one of them."

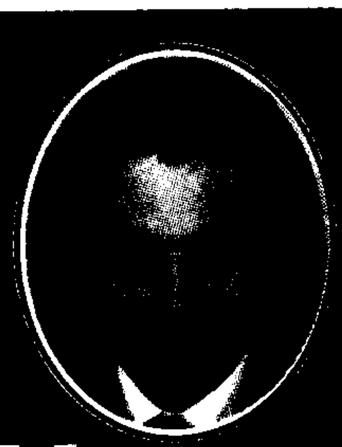
Mast debate turns into farce

Watford Observer

Advertisement

Alan Milburn

DICKY WHITTINGTON!


Tony Blair

THE BEST PANTO IN LONDON

Old Lady

Duncan Smith

IT'S the hilarious story of an old lady who was ignored by staff and left on a trolley!
Oh no, it isn't!
Oh yes, it is!
Oh no, it isn't!
Oh yes, it is!

★ STARRING the hilarious TV double-act 'BLAIR AND DUNCAN SMITH'
She called the nurse a darkie!
Oh no, she didn't!
Oh yes, she did!

★ CO-STARRING unknown newcomer ALAN MILBURN
Where's your career, Alan?
It's behind you!

YES, a traditional British farce set in an ill-equipped theatre

'IT'LL HAVE YOU IN STITCHES...'
(if you're prepared to wait for three days in a corridor)

GAYS BACK TORIES

by Our Political Staff **Matthew Gay Paris**

IN A dramatic u-turn, homosexuals yesterday said that in future they would respect the rights of other people "to be practising Tories".

"Many decent people," said a spokesman, "from all walks of life have owned up to having Conservative leanings and it is time we accepted this minority view as normal.

"For too long," he continued, "we have been guilty of looking at Tories as if they were deviant freaks who deserved our pity and could be cured if only they met the right member of the Labour party.

"Let's live and let live," he concluded, "and as a mark of how far we have come, I am going to shake hands with Oliver Letwin."

Michael Portillo must be livid.

POLLY FILLER

IS IT me or has the whole country gone mad? It's only February and everybody has already booked their summer holidays. Haven't they got anything better to do than trawl the internet looking for villas in the Tuscany-Umbria borders or gites (with pool) in the Dordogne?

Apparently not. Because when I logged on to agreeableholidays.co.uk there was nothing left except for a 3-bedroom loggia outside Siena with a *shared* pool.

Shared?! Surely that must contravene the European law on Human Rights! I mean, I don't go on holiday in order to find myself being dive-bombed by ghastly children whose parents probably live nextdoor to us in London!

Besides, the toddler Charlie, because he is so much brighter than average, has acquired a very adult vocabulary and tends to tell other children (and adults!!) to "F*** off!".

We know that he is just exploring the boundaries of acceptable word play but less enlightened holidaymakers might take exception!

Anyway, the upshot is that we've got *nowhere* to go on holiday. Nowhere! France is full, Italy is stuffed and the only vacancies left are in Spain (really!), Greece (I think not!) or Turkey (now you are being silly!).

Of course, we all know who is to blame for this nightmare, this "Pre-holiday from hell", as I call it – the useless Simon.

SIMON was meant to book the holiday in January but has spent the last four weeks malingering in hospital, pretending to projectile vomit. Note the word "*male-lingering*" because only pathetic men ever seem to catch these so-called superbugs, leaving *women* to do all the work.

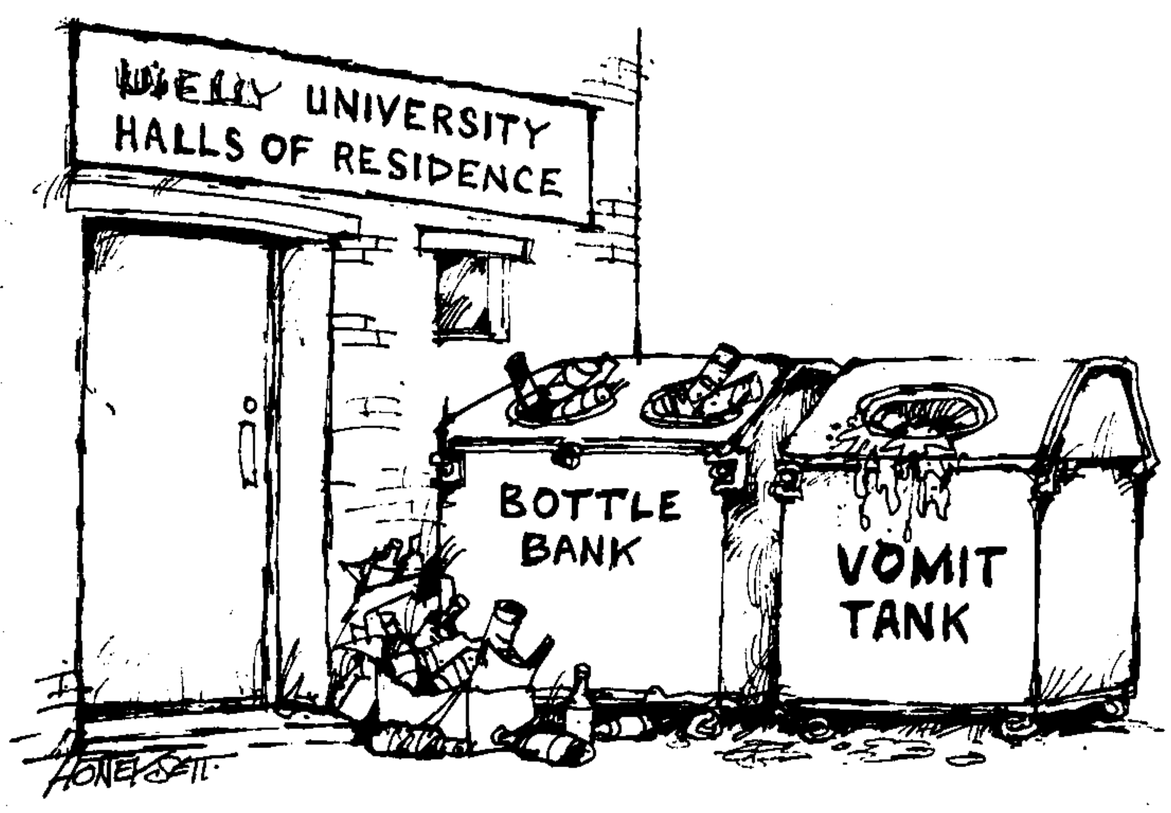
Saleema the au-pair is frankly exhausted and is asking if she can go back home to Afghanistan for a few days!!!

The lazy girl has been reading all those pieces in the newspapers about Nannies' Pay – "26k per year + national insurance + car + own flat + holiday". Well, not in the Filler household, dear!!!

I had to point out to the greedy trollop that she's technically an "au pair", not a nanny, which means "£26-a-week + ironing + cleaning + babysitting + NOTHING!" (You have to take a firm line with these girls or they walk all over you!!)

What *are* things coming to when your au pair can go on holiday and you can't! As I said, the whole country has gone mad.

© Polly Filler.



COMPETITION

Who Wants To Be A Millionaire Author?

The notorious Victorian criminal Jack The Ripper was actually, in your opinion:

A	Queen Victoria
B	Lytton Strachey
C	Alfred Lord Tennyson
D	Jeffrey Archer

All you have to do is explain the reasons for your choice in 50,000 words and send it to an American publisher.

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Stratford Johns, television actor

So. Farewell then
Stratford Johns.

Better known as
Inspector Barlow
Of Z Cars.
And Softly Softly.

There was you,
Frank Windsor
And the one
From Northern
Ireland.

Altogether now, Da-da-da
De-dum-dum-dum-dum
Da-da-da
De-dum-dum-dum.
That was the theme tune
That made you
Famous.

E.J. Thribb (17½)

ME AND MY SPOON

THIS WEEK

ANDREW LORD WEBBER

Lord Webber, you come from a very musical family. Did any of you play the spoons?

My brother is one of the world's great cellists, and my father was a much under-rated composer, as indeed am I. But I don't think any of us ever played the spoons. But one of the things I've learned in life is that you can't be good at everything.

Now that all your musicals have closed down, will spoons play a bigger part in your life?

It's quite possible. At the moment I am exploring all kinds of ideas of where I might go next.

"Spoon" notoriously rhymes with "moon" and "June". Have you ever used this in any of your musicals?

When you've written as many hit musicals as I have, you can't be expected to write every word of every show. But I am currently working on a musical with Frank Skinner based on the old nursery rhyme "Hey Diddle Diddle" where, you may remember, at the end the dish runs away with the spoon. The whole cast are dressed up as plates and spoons and the dish sings this big romantic number "Don't Run Away From Me" *(hums tune)*.

That sounds familiar? Isn't that from *Cats*?

Are you suggesting that all my spoons sound the same? I mean 'tunes'.

No, of course not. I'm sorry, Lord Webber. Has anything amusing ever happened to you in connection with a spoon?

No.

NEXT WEEK: Andrew Marr — "Me And My Friend Tony Blair". (Shurely 'rubber band'? Ed.)

DIARY

H.M. QUEEN ELIZABETH II

Sunday

A hectic week ahead. After church, Mr Lucian Freud, who is a painter, arrives to paint another portrait.

He is quite old.

When I ask if he likes corgis, he tells me he does.

Good, I say. I ask him if he has been painting long.

He tells me he has.

How interesting, I say.

He doesn't reply.

Otherwise precious little small talk. He tells me he paints pictures, mainly. A lovely hobby, I say.

I might have asked him if he wouldn't be awfully kind and paint over that crack on the bathroom ceiling, but I forgot. They tell me he can be desperately expensive, so I think we've got off lightly!

Freud is not a name you hear very often.

At lunchtime, I open a new day-care centre in Warrington. They kindly present me with a "pizza".

I thank them, and assure them that I will wear it when I get home, if I can make it stay on. A piece of pink ribbon might do the trick.

Monday

In the evening, Edward and his wife arrive. We all shake hands.

She has fair hair.

"Hello, mummy," he says, "We were just passing so we thought we'd just drop by to say hello."

I say hello.

"Hello," says his wife.

"You remember Sophie, of course," says Edward.

"Of course," I say, making her feel at home. "Have you come far?"

She says she hasn't come all that far: they live quite near Windsor.

She starts stroking a corgi. "That's Patch," I say, "He's a lovely, lovely boy, aren't you, Patch? Yes you are – you're a lovely, lovely, lovely boy! Who's a lovely boy, then?" Patch loves a little chat. I suppose we all do, really, when you think about it.

I turn to Edward. "Have you had a busy day?" I ask him, "Do you live nearby?"

Philip comes into the room. "You know Sophie, of course," I say. But I'm afraid to say Philip is in one of his moods!

"I thought I b***** told you No Filming in the Palace" says Philip, snatching a tiny little camera device from out of Edward's hand.

"Oh be like that then," says Edward, "Some of us have a job to do." He leaves with his wife, shutting the door behind them with quite a bang. "I do hope you have a safe trip home," I say.

At this time of year, as the days begin to grow longer, it is nice to keep in touch with one's family.

Tuesday

I receive my Prime Minister, a Mr Blair. He informs me of his plans for revitalising the National Health and modernising the railway system.

"This is all very interesting indeed," I say.

"Thank you," he says.

"You've obviously put a tremendous amount of thought into it," I say.

"Yes," he says.

"Railways are still very popular," I tell him. "They are particularly useful if people want to get from A to B and for one reason or another they don't have a driver."

"You've hit the nail on the head," he says.

After fifty years as their monarch, I have a wealth of knowledge and experience to offer my Prime Ministers.

"And hospitals form a vitally important part in the health of the nation," I tell him, adding, "Though, important as hospitals are, they wouldn't be as effective without doctors and nurses – not to mention patients."

I have had quite a number of Prime Ministers during the course of my reign. One of them was a woman. The others were men.

Mr Blair is busy telling me about nursing shortages in central London when the clock chimes.

I convey to him our meeting is at an end by making a subtle incline of my head, holding out my hand and saying "Have you got far to go?"

I think my Prime Ministers appreciate the sense of continuity that only a Monarch can give them.

As he leaves, I notice that one of Mr Blair's shoelaces is almost undone. I tell Philip about it in the evening. He roars with laughter. He reminds me of the occasion on which the Bishop of Norwich stepped backwards, fell over and broke his ankle whilst taking a service at Sandringham.

Needless to say, by this time we are both in absolute fits!

Wednesday

A reception at B.P. for leaders of the Commonwealth, many of them in colourful national dress. They love bright colours, particularly shiny coloured beads. They shake my hand with a natural sense of rhythm.

I observe that most of them have a far keener sense of history and tradition than many of their British and European counterparts – they bow quite beautifully and treat me with the very greatest respect and devotion.

There is no doubt that we in the West must move with the times, but there is always a danger that we are moving too fast, and losing something very precious in the process. In this day and age, deference should never be a dirty word.

"May I present the President of Somalia, ma'am," says my Foreign Secretary.

"And where are you from?" I ask him.

"Somalia, ma'am," he replies, with a deep bow.

"That must be very convenient," I say, "Though it must be frightfully hot."

It is conversations such as these, conducted between friends in the family of nations, that constantly afford me hope that a better world lies ahead of us.

This evening, my son Andrew turns up. He is divorced. "I was just passing by so I thought I'd just pop in to say hello," he says.

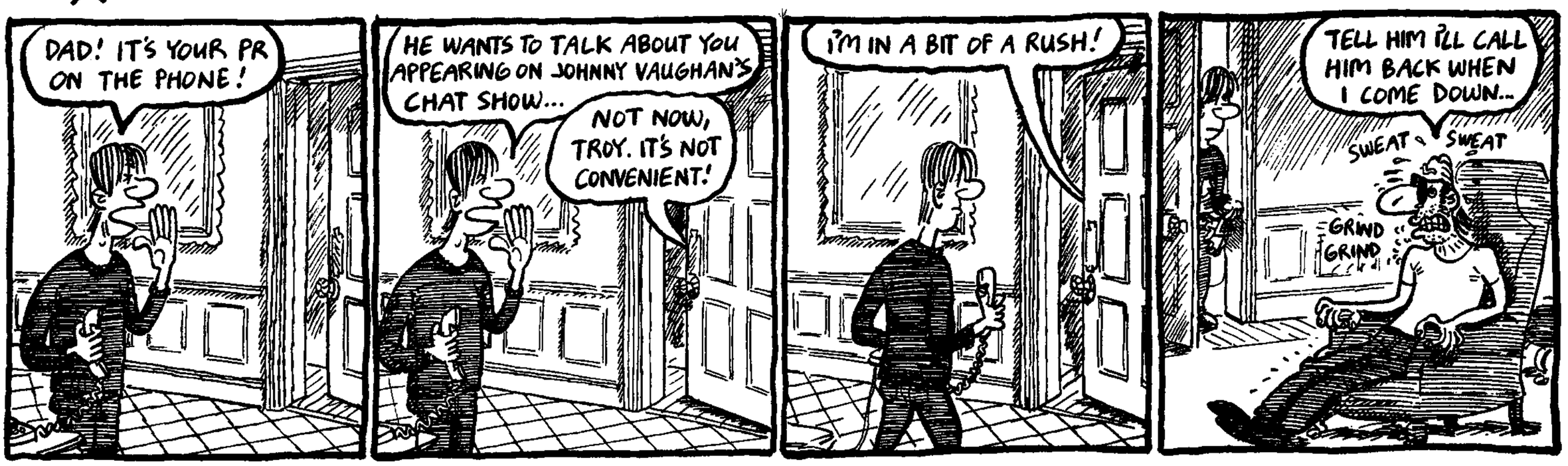
"Have you been waiting long?" I say, setting him at his ease, "Have you done this sort of thing before? Keep you busy, do they?"

As told to

CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER


DAD! IT'S YOUR PR ON THE PHONE!
HE WANTS TO TALK ABOUT YOU APPEARING ON JOHNNY VAUGHAN'S CHAT SHOW...
NOT NOW, TROY. IT'S NOT CONVENIENT!
I'M IN A BIT OF A RUSH!
TELL HIM I'LL CALL HIM BACK WHEN I COME DOWN..
SWEAT
SWEAT
GRIND
GRIND

Literary Review

Holden Balls

Fame Fatale
Wendy Holden
(Headline, £10)

ENOUGH, enough, enough. Enough retail therapy, enough chardonnay. Enough professional/personal life quandaries, hideous dinner-party faux-pas, big pant disasters and woeful kitchen-craft. Enough of Men from Mars and those things they always do, and enough scything observations of contemporary London like "the train was – wouldn't you know it – delayed."

It is now 2002, seven years since *Bridget Jones's Diary* struck a chord with a well-paid portion of the nation who happen to buy books. Everyone knows everything there is to know about the travails of the twentysomething girl-about-town who sings 80s ballads to herself in an untidy SW7 flat.

Unfortunately, no one thought to mention this to Wendy Holden, Jane Green, Marian Keyes, Jenny Colgan, Jill Mansell, Adele Parks, Sophie Kinsella or any of the other kitten-heeled hackettes who prop up the paperback bestsellers' list. And no one told their publishing houses either, although they aren't remotely bothered because Chick Lit is still selling like to-die-for Manolos in the January sales.

Yet there is light at the end of the tunnel. For if offerings like Wendy Holden's *Fame Fatale* are anything to go by, the genre – its fatuous heroines, its meccano plotlines and its cartoon covers – is dying a drawn-out death. The only agreeable thing about being keelhauled across another 400 pages of pap is coming up the other side knowing that the ship's going down.

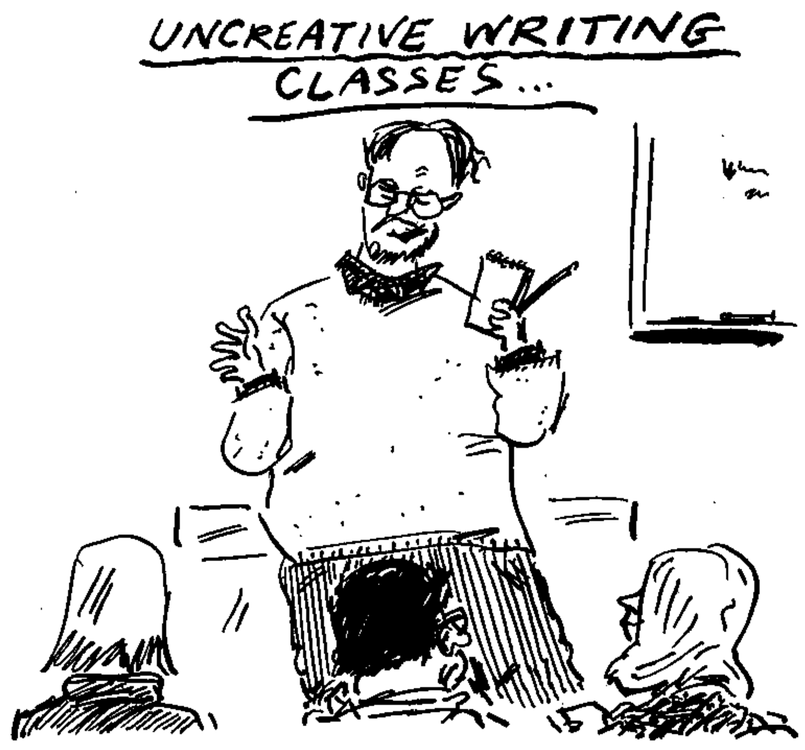
In this instance Grace, our heroine, works in publishing. So, as it happens, did Bridget Jones. Grace makes a ninny of herself at a book launch. So did Bridget. Grace falls for a good-looking Romeo before realising that Mr Right was there beside her all the time, and she just didn't realise it. So far, so Bridget. Yet Bridget, crucially, was funny. *Fame Fatale*, as the title suggests, is mercilessly unamusing. *Sushi for Beginners* Chick-Lit matriarch Marian Keyes claims to have "laughed out loud" on the back cover, which tells you all you need to know.

But dismantling Holden's plotting or prose style is like smashing crisps with a spade. It's much more intriguing to see how such cheese is dressed to sell. From page one *Fame Fatale* revels in purporting to be some kind of *roman à clef*, with real-life celebs – Robbie Williams, Nick Hornby – intermingling with writers given names like Jenny Bristols and Sassy Jenks. It's not hard to discern who's behind the various pseudonyms – the question is, why? The punters who are expected to buy this book in droves are unlikely to know or care that, say, Sassy Jenks is Zadie Smith. Instead they are being titillated with the waft of dirt being dished – when it isn't. The implication that there's another dimension to what is an identikit novel is a cheap trick. Gratifyingly, it's a ploy that backfires.

For Holden's "satire" on literary London frequently ends up shooting itself squarely in the foot. The vacuousness of the literary scene is continually lampooned – in a book that is the very exemplar of the scene's vacuousness. And there are other specific examples of Wendy biting the hand that feeds: at one point, the cable TV flop *Taste Today with Anthea Turner* is labelled as the apotheosis of "Z-List Hell". Anthea Turner's 2000 autobiography was ghostwritten by… Wendy Holden.

Best of all are Holden's bad sex issues. Much of the latter part of the novel is concerned with how Mr Sexy-but-Nasty gets his comeuppance by having his new book scoop a *Literary Review* Bad Sex Award. This, one presumes, is supposed to represent an ironic titter from the author after her own real-life nomination in 2000 for another execrably-titled frothpot, *Bad Heir Day*. Alas, as few of her readership will get the in-joke, it only focuses attention on future possible bad sex contenders, such as this one from p298: "Grace felt herself to be on a journey with but one rapturous conclusion. As, with the inevitability of a waterfall, she glided to the edge of the cliff and went over, the slow, electric shudder spreading exquisitely through her body."

The final ruse is to smear the text with a surfeit of contemporary references – ad slogans, Big Brother, Harry Potter, Radiohead – all designed to conceal an ailing formula in a zeitgeist whirl. But as the namechecks mount up, proclaiming a novel indefinably of the moment, they merely serve to remind that for the story beneath it all, that moment has passed.



"Go to a big bookshop, see what's selling..."

Mything the point

The Novels Of Iris Murdoch
(Penguin)

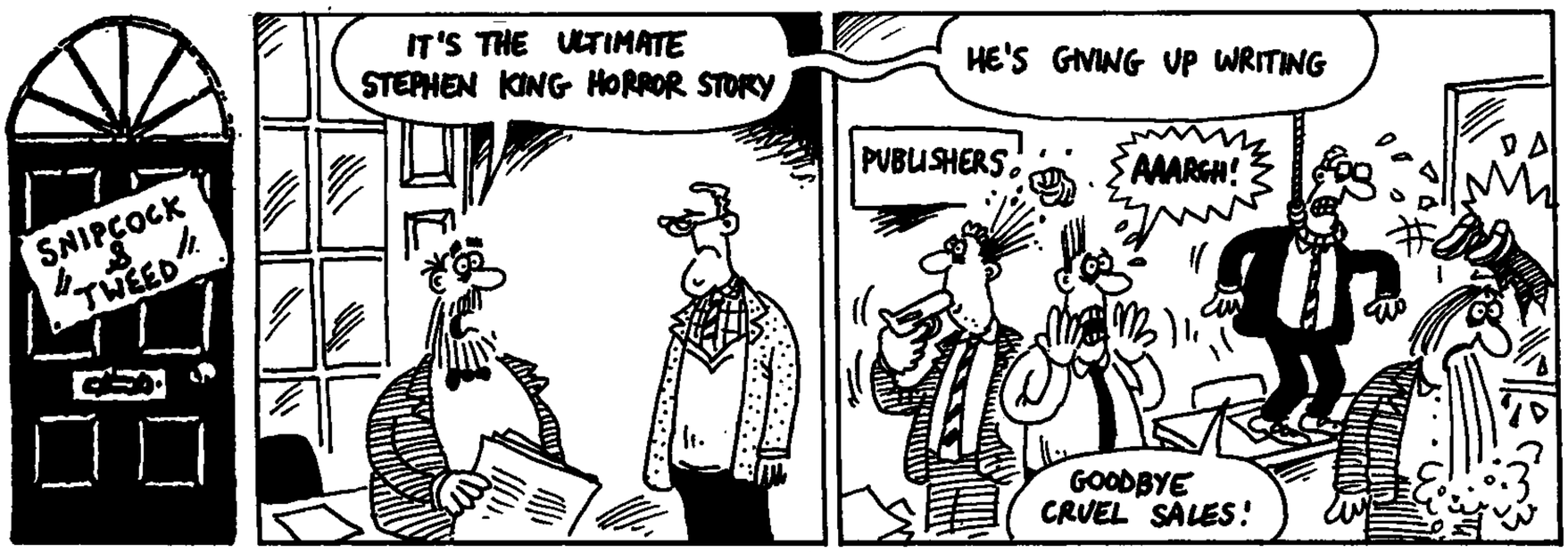
IRIS Murdoch loved her Shakespeare and so her ghost must feel gratified that the general response to the movie *Iris* – in which Kate Winslet plays her going shagging and Dame Judi her going mad – has been: "Oh what a noble mind was here o'erthrown." Audiences from Oxford to Cambridge have wept as they watch Alzheimer's wiping away "the greatest mind of her generation". The only regret of some reviewers of the film – and of a puffy BBC Omnibus documentary timed to coincide with it – was that the concentration on her neurological decline was distracting attention from the novels.

Well, let's have a look at them, then. Murdoch's fictional project was essentially to borrow plots from Shakespeare and ideas from Plato and meld them together as novels. Characters with names like Lysander Prosper chat and shag on islands or at large country houses, arguing over whether perfect love or essential goodness is achievable until, after a few hints of the supernatural, the plot is resolved in an exaggerated flurry of deaths or marriages. It's like A.S. Byatt without the jokes.

An early Murdoch – *The Nice And The Good* (1968) – is pretty typical. Ducane, a civil servant, has the aim of "becoming a good man". A colleague, Radeechy, offers a convenient contrast by being a Satanist with a necromancy chamber in the caverns under Whitehall. If Dennis Wheatley had read Philosphy at Oxford, he'd have written something like this. It all interconnects with a big house in Dorset where people with names like Octavian say things like: "How clever you are. You have a plausible answer for everything."

A decade later, *The Sea, The Sea* (1978) – the plot of *The Tempest* crossed with a seminar on ethics – was winning the Booker Prize. Featuring the by now familiar collection of Oxbridge eccentrics, the book sees Murdoch, though notionally a contemporary novelist, abandoning all connection with a recognisable England. The central character is Charles Arrowby, a famous theatre director, although he's more Sir Henry Irving than Sir Peter Hall. People live in "maisonettes" and talk about "kiddies" as if Murdoch had taken a quick Berlitz course on Ordinary Talk.

By *The Book And The Brotherhood* (1987), it's pretty clear that living the life of the mind is a restriction in the writing of fiction, which requires observation of the way things look and how people speak. A pack of characters with names including Gulliver Ashe and Conrad Lomas argue over a book – a sort of unified field theory of thought and politics – which one of them is pledged to write. The constant sense in Murdoch that the characters were happiest at university is made explicit in a passage where they discuss the proper care of faculty apparel: "I don't think



college scarves ever get washed. It would destroy the patina."

One of the most poignant moments in *Iris* is the scene in which the writer finishes her final novel – clearly *Jackson's Dilemma* (1995) – and expresses relief that the Alzheimer's already becoming apparent has not yet affected her fiction. So rapid is her decline that, when an advance hardback copy of the book arrives just over a year later, Murdoch can't even remember that she was ever a novelist.

But, reading the book now, the failure of anyone to guess that there was something seriously wrong can only be attributed to a much longer sentimental conspiracy of silence among publishers and reviewers about the quality of Murdoch's fiction.

Jackson's Dilemma – its narrative the usual guff about high ideas being exchanged around an aristocratic wedding – is written with almost childlike simplicity. The introduction to one character explains that he was "good-looking. He was tall and thin and pale." On the day in question, "the sun was shining". Faced with such stuff, Miss Smith would have told her nine year olds to pep up their compositions a bit but literary gels – Kate Kellaway, Julie Myerson, Jane Gardam – rushed to acclaim a masterpiece. Oh, and in a novel notionally set in the mid-90s, a sample piece of dialogue runs: "Wait, wait, pale maiden... let me blunder across the space between us."

So let's be honest. The story of Iris Murdoch is not a tragedy that the Oscar-winning potential of her Alzheimer's has led to a forgetting of her novels but a mystery that the literary world ever took such common-room camp so seriously. Reading now like opera librettos without the welcome distraction of the music, Murdoch's novels belong, like those of C.P. Snow, to a time when grown men and women really cared whether an "Oxford mind" and a "Cambridge mind" were different things and discussed "the ideal of goodness" over buttered crumpets. It's Snow, though, who's the really tragic figure. His final illness had no cinematic potential.

Books & Bookmen

■ PUBLISHERS should be careful when buying books from showbiz agents, who ask for and usually get the sort of fees their charges can expect for several major TV appearances.

In particular they should be wary of Jan Kennedy of Billy Marsh Associates, who managed to wring £550,000 out of Gordon Wise of Sidgwick and Jackson for Bruce Forsyth's far-from-bestselling autobiography (*Eyes passim*).

Now she has sold the life story of *Supermarket Sweep*'s Dale Winton to Anna Cherrett at Random House's Century imprint, the editor having shown the misplaced generosity for which her superior Kate Parkin has become legendary. The exact figure paid is unknown, but bidding is understood to have been started by Kennedy at £300,000 and to have reached almost-Forsythesque levels.

Perhaps Winton's vague celebrity might lift sales slightly out of the doldrums, but it's hard to imagine him providing any earth-shattering revelations that will stop the book "doing a Brucie". Still, he and Kennedy will be laughing all the way to the bank.

■ REPORTING the Whitbread Book of the Year award, the *Indescribablyboring*'s David Lister made much of winning author Philip Pullman's principled stands. It was Pullman, Lister reminded readers, who led the protests against the ineligibility of children's books for the top prize.

In addition, as Lister had it, Pullman has no time for marketing gambits that don't allow his books to stand on their own merits, unlike J.K. Rowling. "Rowling's books have been printed with different covers to woo an adult audience, a tactic that worked," says Lister. Pullman, however, makes no such compromise. He refuses to acknowledge a distinction."

Er... a visit to any high street bookshop will confirm that Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy, of which his Whitbread-winner *The Amber Spyglass* is book three, was issued last September in specially-designated "adult editions" with sober covers. Either Lister got the wrong end of the stick or Pullman's publisher Scholastic isn't sending its star author detailed royalty statements.

■ THE *Sunday Telegraph* seems to have developed a novel new way of commissioning features.

When Tom Carew, author of *Jihad: the Secret War in Afghanistan*, was contacted by *Torygraph* hack Olga Craig last October, he thought he was merely providing background for an article that she was writing, something he was perfectly happy to do.

He was less happy when the results of the conversation were printed under his name and the headline "Americans go in to scatter the enemy". Not unnaturally, Carew pressed *Torygraph* editor Dominic Lawson for an apology and his usual fee for such an article — £1,000. Deputy editor Matthew d'Ancona then persuaded Carew to accept the usual *Torygraph* rate — half — and to allow them a month's grace. Unfortunately by mid-January the money had still not materialised, and the matter is now in the hands of Carew's lawyers.

'Bookworm'

"Do you ever worry that in our rush to get schools online we've neglected core skills?"

Pseuds Corner

I guess there are a number of subtle differences between the Maharishi offices and those of a high-street bank... we try and cater to aspects beyond the visual environment, and our offices and showroom were designed with feng-shui considerations, as well as being furnished with geopathic stress eliminators... All the water in the building is reverse-osmosis triple-filtered through a pipe wrapped in a copper spiral containing imploded water. But then I've heard of fashion houses who only hire Cancerians... We don't do any of that.

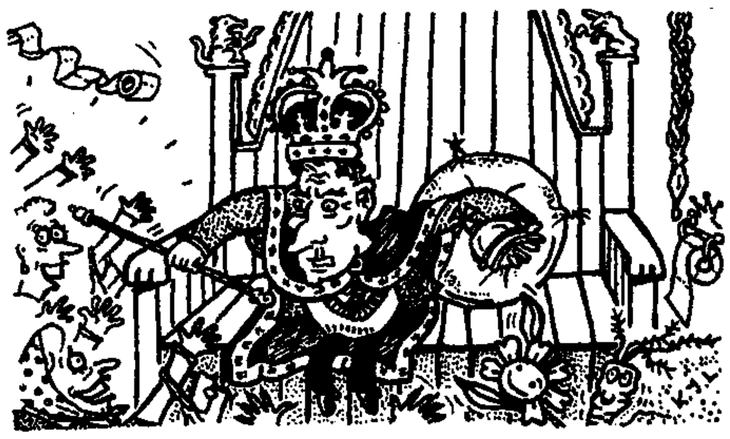
HARDY BLECHMAN
Observer

Now that I've grown up a bit, I can't help but applaud anyone who refuses to do their business in the dark. I'm fascinated by the London pissers because I think their appearance marks a decisive break from bourgeois manners and mores. Where other commentators see vulgarity as another nail in the coffin of "civilisation", I see a refutation of the tenets which supported the most pernicious lie of the last century – the claim that everyone is middle class. In refusing to feel ashamed of their actions, the pissers are reclaiming the ground that was lost when the working class decided that it might have something to gain from transforming itself into a paler, poorer version of the bourgeoisie.

CHARLOTTE RAVEN
Guardian

The interchange between these rhythms is complex: the percussion syntax of [John] McGahern's sentences transmits to the most routine actions the beat of an impersonal process and the variations of the human consciousness that modifies it. So we are told: "Tea was made. Milk and several spoons of sugar were added to the tea and stirred."

SEAMUS DEANE
Guardian



At a deeper level Prince Charles harks back to a primal understanding of the monarch, as representing order and taking on the forces of chaos, and to the sacrificial dimension of royalty found in primal religion and the Bible.

IAN BRADLEY
Guardian

The work of Houlton Taylor [a firm of architects] is fuelled by the awkwardness of things, the location and dislocation of the imagery of place and artefact. The temperament of the work places emphasis upon interfacing with what is inherently present, sensing when to be consensual but as a latent force alert to the conditions that provide the opportunity to shift visual conventions.

University of Bath lecture publicity

Sometimes the images seem almost to be breathing. The viewer, like some nervous mother creeping back to the cradle in which her newborn lies sleeping, finds him or herself doubling back to the picture just after leaving it, just wanting to check... and there it is... that slight movement... that reassurance that the work is still living. The pleasure of seeing renews itself over and over again.

RACHEL CAMPBELL-JOHNSON
(reviewing a Paul Klee exhibition)
The Times

Pseuds Corporate

Sharpening efficiency

We will deliver a systematic and sustained programme of efficiency and measures for improved effectiveness, translated into sustainable local delivery to ensure the delivery of more stretching centrally derived targets. There will be more emphasis on local ownership and accountability for the identification and delivery of efficiencies.

Communicating and influencing

We will use clear and focused communications...

Environment Agency website publication
The Vision for our environment: making it happen

CONTRIBUTORS: Edward Lindsay, Ian Goddard, Eoin Dillon, Ivan Proctor, Wendy Ritson, Wendy Newman, Mark Abbey

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

ENRON

THE MAHONIA MYSTERY

THE cost of Enron's vast gas-fired power station on Teesside was met by fleecing four newly-privatised regional electricity companies, Midlands, Northern, SWALEC and SWEB.

Executives from all four companies where whisked to Teesside one Saturday morning by helicopter and were rapidly persuaded by Enron's stetson-hatted whizzkid John Wing to sign up for many years in advance to buy electricity from the new station.

Though the deal with the regional electricity companies (RECs) paid for the power station, it did not pay for the expensive pipeline that had to be built to get gas into the station. To solve this problem Enron bought – at an uncomfortably high price – the J-blocks of gas fields in the North Sea.

It was clear that the price of gas was likely to collapse under the competition ushered in by the government. From 1994, the price did indeed collapse, but the auditors and accountants for Enron, Arthur Andersen, still saw no need to make any proper provision for the losses likely to occur from the purchase of the J-blocks. A long series of legal actions about the J-Blocks and the pipeline followed. Once again, large losses were likely from these actions. In 1997 Enron paid out more than $400m to buy itself out of the contracts it had negotiated, but there had been no provision for this vast sum in the accounts.

The accounts of Enron Europe were audited throughout by the British arm of the American accountants Arthur Andersen. The accountants' speciality in Britain, as in America, was the "off-balance sheet" deal – a licence to executives and former executives to make their own deals on the back of the company without having to record the deals in the accounts. By such means the company was able to mortgage the Teesside power station, the symbol of its British wealth in the first place. The details of this complicated mortgage are expected to take up a lot of time for the investigators now pouring over the Enron accounts.

The extent of the complexity and imagination involved in such deals was partially revealed in the *Financial Times* of 15 January, which reported that $2.2bn worth of deals were done by Enron over the last four years, with a mysterious group of companies called Mahonia. The companies, based in Jersey and other Channel Islands, signed forward contracts to deliver oil and gas to Enron.

Such contracts have only come to light because of a spat between insurers and Enron's banker, J.P. Morgan. And the name "Mahonia" continues to puzzle investigators. Whether it has anything to do with Geoff McMahon, the Irish-American former chief financial officer of Enron Europe, who was Enron's chief corporate financial officer world-wide at the time of its final demise (and now promoted yet again) has yet to come to light.

GETTING THE WIND UP

WHILE Enron has bitten the dust, some of the energy giant's subsidiaries are riding out the storm, including Enron Wind Overseas Development (EWOD), and "new" Labour ministers are bending over backwards to help the survivors.

On 25 January the Council for the Protection of Rural Wales (CPRW), together with five other Welsh conservation groups, wrote to DTI secretary Patricia Hewitt demanding a public inquiry into plans to build the UK's largest ever wind farm at Cefn Croes in Ceredigion, near Aberystwyth. This followed the announcement by energy minister Brian Wilson that he was minded to grant planning permission.

The developer behind the wind farm is the Edinburgh-based Renewable Development Company (RDC), which is in turn funded by Enron Wind, a division of the American Enron Corporation. RDC recently released a statement saying the company would be unaffected by Enron's bankruptcy as EWOD is a stand-alone company which continues to trade with a positive cash flow.

Local residents and conservationists fear the £35m development of 39 turbines up to 100m high will create a hideous eyesore in the uniquely beautiful Cambrian uplands. The CPRW is also concerned about the planning process.

Owing to its unprecedented size, Cefn Croes is the first wind power station in Wales to be approved by the secretary of state and not the local planning authority. Contrary to the advice of its own planning officer, Ceredigion county council passed up the automatic right to a public inquiry when it failed to lodge an objection against the planning application. Nevertheless the government's statutory adviser, the Countryside Council for Wales, objected to the development as did many local community councils and conservation groups, leaving it up to the minister's discretion whether to hold a public inquiry. Wilson decided against an inquiry and waved through the proposed farm with no formal public discussion on the issue.

PS: Gerry Jewson and Mark Oldridge of the Renewable Development Company sit on the Scottish parliament's renewable energy group, which receives an annual £235 donation towards the running of its secretariat from Enron Wind.

PS on the PSPP

WHEN it published the names of its much-prized public services productivity panel, the government, according to a treasury press release, "looked for people who would be willing to challenge current practice and who had sufficient stature to be taken seriously".

The 16-member panel therefore included Clare Spottiswoode, former director of Azurix, Enron's former water subsidiary and chair of buyEnergyonline, a company set up to trade in energy in the manner made famous by Enron.

Ms Spottiswoode hit the headlines when it was revealed that the department of trade civil servant who recommended her for the job of director-general of OFGAS, John Michell, sent her flowers on her appointment. At the time of this revelation, few reporters could find Ms Spottiswoode because she was on a flight to Houston, Texas, with Mr Michell to visit the Enron HQ.

The panel also included Keith Burgess, former worldwide managing partner of Andersen Consulting, the firm that helped the Labour party's commission for social justice with a lot of free accountancy work.

POLICE 5

FOURTEEN years after Lynette White was murdered in her Cardiff flat, South Wales police have announced that they have obtained DNA evidence from the crime scene belonging to the person they believe is "directly involved in the murder".

One of the first to volunteer his DNA for testing was Tony Paris, one of the so-called Cardiff Three who served fours years for Lynette's stabbing before being freed by the appeal court.

Last month, determined that no smear should remain against him, Paris was the first of the three to submit himself for testing. He insisted, however, that his solicitor take his sample to an independent forensic lab for testing so it was never unattended in the hands of South Wales police, whom he does not trust.

And with good reason. The force's record on serious crime is so deplorable – 16 unsolved murders, five grave miscarriages of justice and seven other cases causing serious concern – that pressure is growing for a full public inquiry.

Elfyn Llywyd, Plaid Cymru's parlimentary leader, is assembling a cross-party delegation of MPs to ask home secretary David Blunkett to order the inquiry. Members of the Welsh assembly have already demanded such an inquiry, worried about "the efficiency and probity of some police officers, current and retired, of the South Wales force".

Though some officers have been named over the miscarriages – for fabricating evidence, bullying suspects or lying on oath – no one has been convicted of any charge or disciplined. "It is a concern for any democracy that this sort of thing can go on for years and years and no one is brought to account," said Nogah Offer, solicitor for a number of those who have been wrongly incarcerated.

One of the driving forces behind the campaign is Michael O'Brien. When he was arrested and convicted in 1988 of the murder of newsagent Philip Saunders, he was a happily married man with one toddler and a baby on the way. When he walked free from prison 11 years later, cleared by the court of appeal, his marriage was over. His baby daughter and his father had died. His son had grown up. The appeal court heard that to secure the conviction of O'Brien and his friends Ellis Sherwood and Darren Hall, police had denied them access to solicitors, bullied and intimidated them. Det Inspector Stewart Lewis was said to have completely made up a confession he claimed to have overheard as O'Brien and Sherwood talked in police cells.

This was a tactic Lewis had used when investigating a nationalist bombing campaign some years earlier. One of those then acquitted at trial, Robert Griffiths, described how Lewis and another officer had sat in front of him making up questions and answers Griffiths was supposed to have given.

In the dossier Mr Blunkett will see, Lewis features in five cases. He has now retired, putting him beyond the jurisdiction of the police complaints authority (PCA). But concerns remain about South Wales' apparently "suspect-led" rather than "evidence led" policing. In Mr O'Brien's case, the force defended its officers right up to and including his appeal last year.

Other cases causing concern include:

- Annette Hewins and Donna Clarke, who served two years for the arson killing of Diane Jones and her two young children before being freed on appeal in 1999.
- Jonathan Jones, freed on appeal after being wrongly sentenced to life for the shotgun murder of his girlfriend's parents, Harry and Megan Tooze.
- Paul and Wayne Darvell, cleared on appeal of the murder of sex shop assistant Sandra Phillips after police fabricated notes.
- Anthony Yellen, cleared of murder after the jury heard evidence suggesting officer Lewis had made up a confession.
- Idris Ali, cleared of murder on appeal after police extracted a "highly suspect" confession.

South Wales police have set up a unit to reinvestigate the cases, but there are concerns that although officers from outside South Wales have headed reviews, local officers involved in the original inquiries still work in the unit. "We cannot trust South Wales police to investigate themselves or uncover the truth about their own officers," said Ms Offer.

TAXING TIMES

ONE aspect of government policy that gets little publicity and no opposition is its encouragement of tax avoidance.

Recent government documents proclaim a new, much more friendly attitude to big firms seeking to avoid tax. In the Inland Revenue and Customs & Excise, the government encourages a "change of culture" to get away from the old fuddy duddy concept that the main job of tax inspectors is to collect taxes and stamp out tax avoidance schemes.

Inland Revenue deputy chairman David Hartnett has spent a lot of the last few months listening to the views of big business, and has become increasingly impressed. Last year he attended a "large corporates" forum for senior Revenue officers and representatives from big business. The minutes of this meeting on 28 September last year were published fleetingly on the Inland Revenue website and hastily removed a few days later. No one knows why.

Among the "large corporates" represented were ICI, British American Tobacco, Dixons, Orange and Rolls Royce. One subject for discussion was the "secondment" of Inland Revenue civil servants to industry. The general view of the businessmen was that it was dangerous to let too many tax inspectors into private industry in case they snooped. David Hartnett hastily conceded that it would "clearly be necessary to agree safeguards". But the forum concluded that it was much safer and wiser for businessmen to go into the Revenue, than for Revenue snoopers to go into industry. It was reported that while there were 20 industry people "seconded" to the Revenue, only one Revenue person had been allowed into industry.

Not long after the meeting the Revenue published a report entitled *Review of Links With Business*. Its 40 recommendations are exclusively devoted to strengthening the influence of big businessmen in assessing their own tax liabilities. They include assessing the quality of Revenue inspectors' work against that of major accountancy firms like PriceWaterhouseCoopers and Arthur Andersen; and designating a whole department of the Revenue's head office as "a champion for business".

The recommendations were the climax of long Revenue consultations with a number of big firms, including accountancy firms and commercial lawyers, some of them under investigation by the Revenue for tax avoidance schemes. One leading firm advising the Revenue for instance is Ernst & Young, the accountancy and consultancy conglomerate exposed in the *Eye* in 1998 for advertising a tax scam to hospital trusts for not paying VAT. After the *Eye*'s article, the government intervened and banned the scam. And what was the punishment meted out to Ernst & Young for so shamelessly trying to rip off the National Health Service? It was given control of the entire railway system, and is now advising the government on ways to improve relations between the tax authorities and big companies.

To complete the picture Mr Hartnett, together with Mike Eland, a member of board of Customs & Excise, has joined the editorial board of *Tax Journal*, a publication devoted almost entirely to advising big companies on how to avoid tax.

MORE DAM FRIENDS

PROVING that "new" Labour's links with multinational business grow stronger by the day, the newly-appointed head of the DTI export credits guarantee department (ECGD) advisory committee is Liz Airey who also sits on the board of AMEC, the construction firm currently seeking £68m in grants from the ECGD to build a controversial dam in Turkey.

The Turkish government's proposal to build the Yusefeli dam in the Coruh river basin near the country's north-eastern border with Georgia will displace up to 30,000 people, mainly from the Georgian minority. Four towns will be totally submerged, 14 partly so and a further 42 towns and villages will be indirectly affected when 400 kilometres of roads are flooded.

The ECGD has a draft environmental impact assessment carried out on behalf of AMEC and the Turkish government by independent Turkish consultants, Encon, but the department says it cannot make this public without AMEC's permission. The ECGD has not yet received a copy of the Turkish government's resettlement plan, but the example of other Turkish dams suggests that it will be woefully inadequate.

The first mention of AMEC's application to the ECGD came in a DTI report last March which linked it to Balfour Beatty's highly-publicised bid for £200m to build the Ilisu dam which would have flooded the ancient town of Hasankeyf and displaced 78,000 people. In November 2001 Balfour Beatty saved the government a great deal of embarrassment by withdrawing from the project altogether. The DTI report said: "Many of the issues raised in connection with the Ilisu dam may also arise over the Yusefeli dam. ECGD and ministers must not only be even-handed as between the two projects, but be seen to be even-handed, in view of the strong view we heard expressed in Turkey that Ilisu is a political football."

So even-handed in fact that the person who will advise trade secretary Patricia Hewitt on whether or not to grant the funds to AMEC is a non-executive director of the company.

SAFE AS HOUSES?

OLD Labour liked and encouraged council housing as affordable homes to rent. "New" Labour hates council housing as unnecessary state interference. So "new" Labour government and councils are making a combined effort to dispose of council homes, many of them built and maintained by old Labour councils.

Their favoured aim is to flog the homes to "registered social landlords" which, like the new Railtrack, are "not for profit" organisations. However, they depend entirely on loans from banks, which are very much all for profit. One obstacle stands in their way. In order to flog their council homes, councils have to win a vote of the tenants affected. And as the truth emerges about the likely role of the banks, more and more tenants are voting no.

In Birmingham, England's largest council house owner, tenants are about to vote on a proposal to sell 80,000 council houses to registered social landlords. Before they agree to bankroll the new landlords, however, the banks are insisting on what they call "early redemption charges" of £204m up front. To meet this huge sum, the council valued its council houses so that they could act as collateral to cover the charges. Whoops! The initial valuation by a consultant was a mere £14.5m – a miserable £150 per property. This was nothing like enough to cover the charges, and the whole deal was in peril. Mercifully and miraculously the valuation started to rise until it just covered the charges demanded by the banks.

The council has moved quickly and expensively to clinch the vote and the sale. Every tenant in Birmingham got a glossy 20-page booklet "explaining" the transfer. The council is shelling out just under £10m on consultants to push the sale through. Housing department staff are visiting every council house to argue the case for the deal. But not everyone is convinced. Several tenants who originally agreed to join the new registered social landlords scheme resigned when they discovered that their first loyalty would be to the new landlords' companies and not to their fellow tenants. Others resigned when they discovered that the first duty of the new landlords will be to pay the salary of a new layer of housing officials, who will receive up to £60,000 a year.

At least one MP, Dr Lynne Jones, MP for Selly Oak, is hostile to the sell-off, as are several Birmingham Labour councillors. Last September, 30 councillors voted to replace council leader Albert Bore, who backed the transfer. Bore was knighted in the new year's honours.

The progress of the vote is being followed most anxiously by the government's community housing task force, led by Sarah Webb. She was a consultant to DTZ Pieda, which led the drive to sell off Birmingham council houses.

FOLLOW-UP... FOLLOW- UP FOLLOW-UP... FOLLOW- UP FOLLOW-UP... FOLLOW- UP

■ **ALAN POWIS:** A teacher outrageously sacked from Coedffranc junior school, near Neath (see *Eyes passim*), has finally won his five-year battle to prove wrongful and unlawful dismissal.

A county court judge has ruled that 51 year old Alan Powis was robbed of his "dignity, self-respect and peace of mind" by the treatment he received over a four-year period from head teacher Sheena Ball. She, said the judge, was guilty of persistent and gross breaches of the school's own disciplinary and capability procedures, had a lack of sensitivity and scant regard for procedural fairness.

Mr Powis, who suffered a nervous breakdown because of his treatment, was awarded an interim payment of £50,000 while full damages, likely to reach well into six figures, are assessed.

Mr Powis is the second teacher to win an action against the school and in particular Miss Ball, who went to extraordinary lengths to justify getting rid of special needs teacher Cerys John after John spoke in support of Mr Powis.

Two years ago an industrial tribunal found that the teacher had lost her part-time contract unfairly, and that Miss Ball's behaviour was "unusual, remote, autocratic and uncommunicative". But so far John has not received a penny compensation or, as she wishes, reinstatement of her afternoon contract.

Neath and Port Talbot council and education personnel boss Dick Lewis have twice made the mistake of backing Ms Ball. In purporting to save the £7,000 cost of Ms John's contract, the council has so far paid out tens of thousands of pounds of legal fees in appeals. Having lost the employment appeal tribunal, the council now seems determined to go to the high court.

■ **BUNNY PINNINGTON:** The nurse who was dismissed in 1998 for blowing the whistle on a Swansea special school's outrageous "do not resuscitate" policy for profoundly disabled children begins her court battle this week to have the sacking declared unlawful. Bunny Pinnington's first hurdle is an appeal against a legal technicality which prevented her appeal going ahead nearly two years ago. Commonsense should ensure that the nurse whom everyone from the ombudsman and the Welsh assembly to the family of the child at the centre of case accepts did the right thing to the highest standards of her profession, finally receives justice.

You can contact Paul Foot on 020 7287 3183 or the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

"NEW" Labour is expert at the old trick of rewriting history. Sadly, in a world where the media either believe what they are told or only what a very short-term, fact-untrammelled memory recalls, this is all too easy. Which is of course why Labour spin doctors do it.

The way in which the Dear Leader and his cronies have tried to distance themselves from their generous accountants by appointment Arthur Andersen, over the legal settlement of the De Lorean fiasco, is but the latest breathtaking example of this face-saving technique.

If you are to believe the government line and the version of events in 1997 trotted out by former attorney-general and giant of jurisprudence Lord Morris, settlement of the 12-year legal battle to recoup the more than £70m lost in the De Lorean scandal was put in train by the Tories; and newly-elected Labour merely followed that excuse to end all excuses… legal advice.

Labour would have us believe the $35m paid by Andersen to settle the US action was the best available (despite claiming an initial $270m) and a triumph. Furthermore, Andersen had lost more millions by being blacklisted from all Whitehall work for 10 years and all those responsible for not informing HMG of De Lorean and Colin Chapman's theft of $17.6m of taxpayers' money were no longer involved with Andersen. Well, up to a point, Lord Morris.

First that payment. The British government could and should have obtained more. With interest the potential claim, had the case gone to trial as planned in 1998, was $500m. Even on the basis that civil claims are always settled for a percentage of the claim because the full amount is never awarded, this was just 7 percent.

But the net recovery was even worse. For as the case was brought under US rather than UK rules – where the loser pays – HMG had to eat the costs of its 12-year court case. These are estimated by those with knowledge of the case as a minimum £10m (almost $20m at the 1997 exchange rate). In the five years before the settlement the annual bills were running at well over $1m. So the net recovery was at best $15m and possibly much less.

But that was not the end of a very poor deal. As part of the settlement HMG agreed it would not seek to recover any further payment from Andersen made to the DeLorean Motor Company creditors despite being the biggest creditor! This turned out to be a bonanza for the other DMC victims.

So could Northern Ireland's department of economic development have been better off to roll the dice and go to court? There were certainly big risks with a foreign government playing an American opponent before a New York jury. But look at what happened when DMC bankruptcy trustee David Allard called Andersen's bluff – unlike HMG – and went to court only months after the British government had settled. Allard sued for $100m claiming negligence by Andersen over the 1978 and 1979 audits when the $17.6m was shared by De Lorean and Chapman whose Lotus Group was paid twice for work to cover up the theft.

The trustee would have probably settled for $5m as Allard had few resources with which to fund the legal battle, unlike the British government. An arrogant and confident Andersen offered nothing close. In March 1998 a New York jury awarded Allard and the creditors $46.2m in damages plus interest which could have made the total $112m. Andersen appealed but in May 1999 decided instead to settle the action by paying the trustee $27.75m – more than a quarter of his original claim. The British taxpayer did not receive a cent. No mention was made by the government or its apologists of the creditors' action or how and why the taxpayer missed out.

Now for that legal advice. From when the British government launched the New York action in 1985 there was a policy of delay and obstruction mounted by Andersen and to some extent by the British government over the sensitive issue of disclosing cabinet documents covering the

disastrous DeLorean investment. Andersen was desperate to have the case in London, not New York, because the damages were certain to be lower – though probably not as low as for what they eventually extracted themselves. There were also endless tedious battles in New York about the legal technicalities of the case as Andersen bid to have the claim thrown out.

As a result by early 1997 the case had still not come to trial when a New York federal judge decided the case should start again in a state court. This rattled the Tories who began a review which ended in the rushed settlement. The New York state judge now in charge – irritated by what he correctly called an "ancient case" – decreed it would go to trial in January 1998. This concentrated everyone's minds. Andersen decided once again to try to have the case heard in London.

This resulted in a July 1997 hearing before Mr Justice Colman who, like his New York counterpart, expressed amazement and exasperation that a case launched 12 years before about events almost 20 years ago had still not come to trial. He effectively ordered arbitration to prevent further delays. With the trial clock ticking in New York both sides presented their case to former law lord Lord Griffiths.

By now both were conscious of the embarrassment a trial would generate. Andersen's would have been shown to have turned a blind eye to fraud and a complete lack of public duty to expose crime. But the "new" Labour government would have had to deal with the naivety of its predecessors who fell for De Lorean and gave him most of the £77m. Callaghan and Thatcher government ministers would also have been exposed over their failure and the failure of civil servants – especially those who were DMC directors appointed as watchdogs – to react to suspicions over De Lorean and criticisms of the project. Andersen had cleverly enjoined the DMC government nominees as third party defendants. Mrs Thatcher would have led a chain of ex-Labour and Tory ministers and senior civil servants to be cross-examined.

Faced with evidence of old Labour incompetence and the risks against winning in a foreign court the Blair government jumped at a deal that cleared up a mess which could be placed at the Tories' door. Especially one with its new friends at Arthur Andersen who had been so helpful and had allies in Gordon Brown and Geoffrey Robinson at the treasury (who would have to finance the court case) and Patricia Hewitt.

Just how much the government asked Griffiths for is unclear. But those with knowledge of the litigation always estimated a minimum reasonable settlement as between $50m and $100m allowing for the original loss plus interest. There was pressure to make sure the settlement reflected a clear victory after so much money had been lost and spent in pursuit of recovery. Andersen, who denied any fault, probably started below $20m. On that basis it is clear who won the poker game.

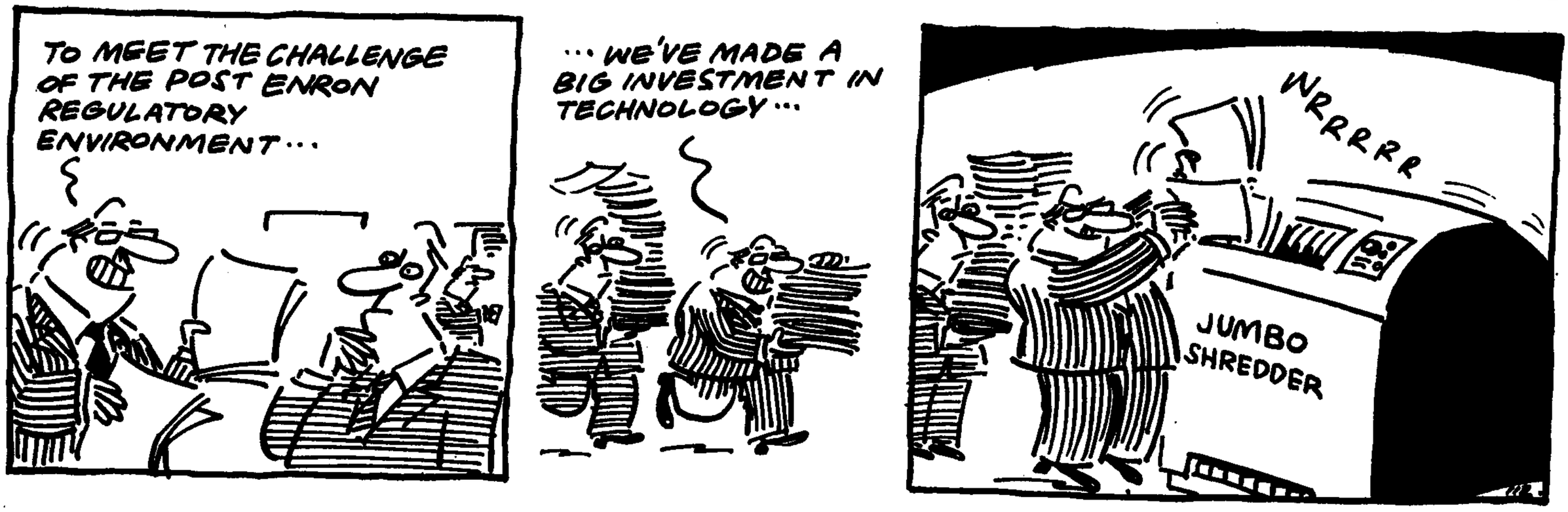
The Blair government wanted a settlement more than Andersen and blinked first. As to the legal advice (in which Blair's friend Lord Falconer may have played a role), it could always have gone to court in New York where there was always a good chance of winning, as Allard proved within months. No wonder one of those closely involved declares of the 1997 deal with deliberate understatement: "You could say they could have made a better settlement."

And what about Andersen and its supposed punishment through being denied government work? Well, first the fabled blacklist was precisely that. It only ever prevented the firm from obtaining audit work. During the period of the supposed Whitehall ban, Andersen received more than £100m in consultancy contracts from government departments under the Tories! In many ways the Thatcher ban was the making of Andersen Consulting. No wonder, by the time of the settlement, the consultants within Andersen were preparing to leave the firm and set up on their own in what is now Accenture. Consultants are rarely sued, but bean-counters always are; so why pay for others' expensive mistakes?

Another justification for the 1997 deal trotted out five years later is that all those responsible for

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE/RIGG


TO MEET THE CHALLENGE OF THE POST ENRON REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT…
…WE'VE MADE A BIG INVESTMENT IN TECHNOLOGY…
WRRRRR
JUMBO SHREDDER

Stock Horror

Another poor value contract from Carphone Warehouse chief executive Charles Dunstone

Value of £100 invested 18 months ago in...

...'high growth' retailer **Carphone Warehouse** when it floated

£51

...'low growth' retailer **Marks & Spencer** at the same time

£162

the De Lorean disaster were no longer involved in Andersen. Maybe not in London, but Richard Measelle had only ever been promoted since ignoring his client's fraud and signing the DMC audit. He was by 1997 Andersen's top audit partner. His evidence helped the jury to find for the creditors.

Did all the favours Andersen had done for "new" Labour and the friends it had made in a bid to defuse Tory hostility dictate the unsatisfactory and all but pyrrhic settlement of the De Lorean scandal? Probably not. Did it influence the decision not to go to court or push for a better settlement? You bet.

NEWS that PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) has quit as the phoney pharaoh's auditor suggests tension between Mohamed Fayed and his increasingly unhappy longtime bean-counter has finally produced a rift. PwC only signed the latest Harrods Holdings accounts in late November – almost 10 months after the year end. In the last two years it has forced ever more disclosure by the secretive Fayed about his finances and spending, such as legal costs and deals in which Harrods sends money into his offshore accounts.

Fees since 1999 have jumped from £300,000 to £500,000 to £700,000 last year – £400,000 on non-audit work. Presumably Fayed hopes Grant Thornton will be cheaper and more pliable. It is noticeable that Fayed did not choose KPMG, which audits the Paris Ritz or PKF which audits Fulham FC. But that way only he has the full picture. However, the switch to a smaller firm is unlikely to help Fayed's hopes for a US listing – nor are the much greater American disclosure requirements. But that looks like the only way now, short of a sale, that Fayed will ever be able to repay his bankers.

THE acquittal of Norwegian broker Erik Langaker once again proved the power of the "missing man" defence – remember the Maxwells?

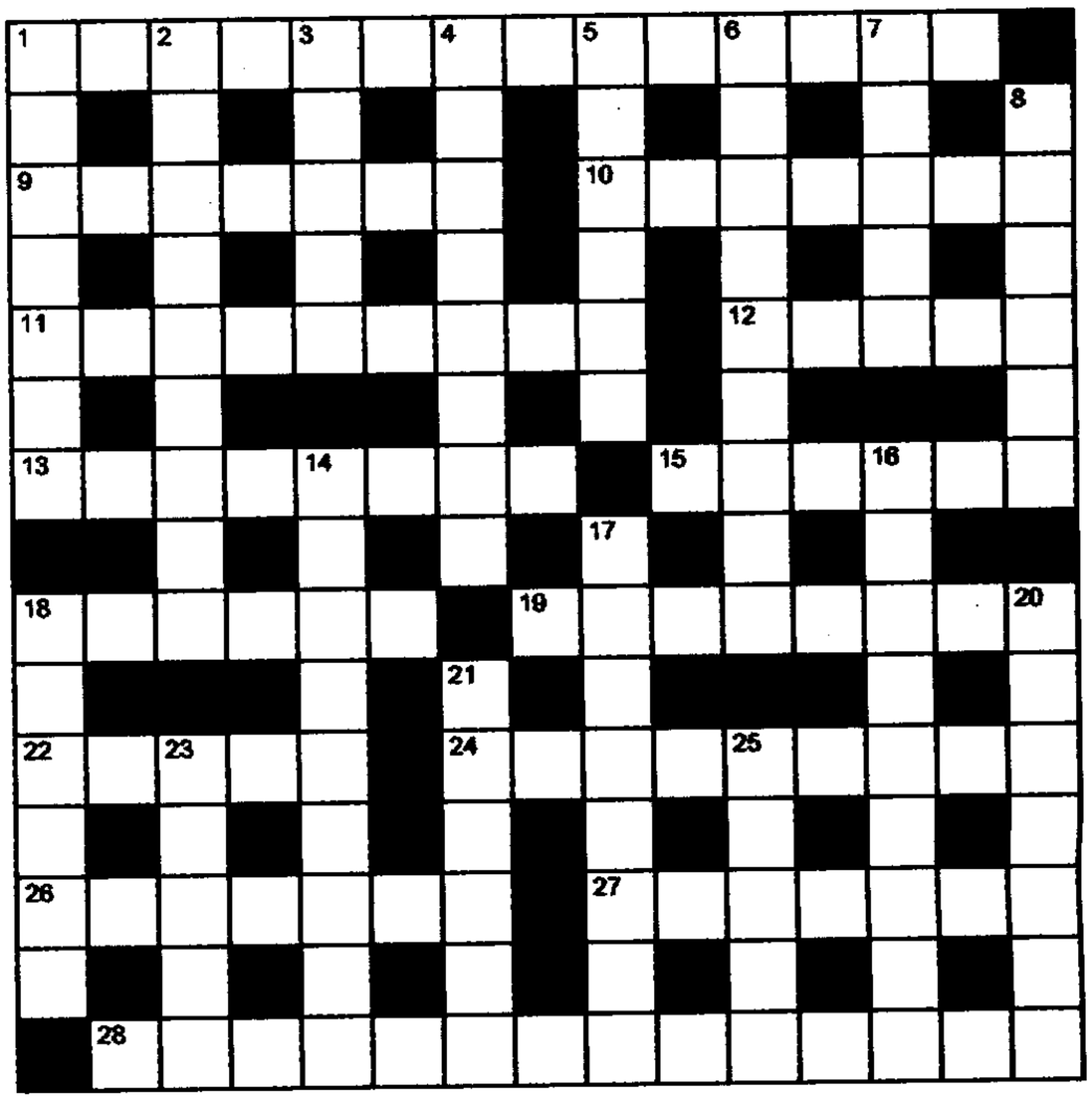
With no Peter Young to share the dock, it was not surprising the jury found that Langaker was only following Morgan Grenfell orders. Especially after it was told not just that his client Young was unfit to be tried, but so too was one of Langaker's colleagues and that there was no case against Young's fund manager colleague, Stuart Armer.

Once Young was found unfit to be tried on grounds of being in a dress, the Serious Farce Office would have done well to decide not to prosecute the others. All prosecutors and criminal lawyers know the "missing man" defence is hard to beat. The SFO could have explained the problem of prosecuting successfully without Young. Instead it is accused of wasting money and now must face the finding of facts hearing – did Young do the acts charged? – with Elizabeth's, aka Peter's, lawyers able to point to the Langaker and Armer acquittals. No finding that Young did what the SFO accuses and there is no court supervision order and no verdict of wrongdoing to aid a recovery claim from Morgan Grenfell which lost £400m. Perhaps then Elizabeth will become Peter again?

'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 202

by Cyclops



£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 15 February 2002.

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk

ACROSS

1 Every known beer (as well as roll) often passes a politician's lips (3,4,3,4)

9 In no position to score, Dicky's on the verge (7)

10 Effecting public cover-up about living outside Mile End (7)

11 Someone who can't get off with Simon turning to flipping relative killer (9)

12 As used by 'goers' at e.g. outdoor rock festivals? (5)

13 Blow delivered by hand on leader (4,4)

15 Surprise passer-by with street shag (6)

18 Clubby thing possibly having sex (head, at any rate) with Schwarzenegger (6)

19 Spring on Barbarian – good, splendidly tackled! (4,4)

22 Member clutched by top notch work-mate (5)

24 Organisation man complimentary to our Brenda and Brian (relatively speaking) (9)

26 Prince's name for a drug (7)

27 Not much up top, dropping heroin – a state of non-existence (4,3)

28 Knacker of the Yard's money-raiser? (10,4)

DOWN

1 Key party clique showing devotion (7)

2 Mae West: "Flies are undone – first sign of Viagra inside" (4-5)

3 Cyclops on date with priestess gets married in a manner of speaking (5)

4 Familiar critic snapping "Arse! Behind!" (not live) (8)

5 Nun was once a month 'confection' (6)

6 Sort of farce that symbolises our government (9)

7 Jimmy's fixes (5)

8 'New' Church of England shortly to get involved in gay movement operation (6)

14 End of Bush (hey! hey!) without vote of the rabble (3,6)

16 State of French agreements commandeered by Tarzan supporter (9)

17 Degenerative state of Damien Hirst's ultimate energy-absorbing composition (8)

18 Fanny's weightlifting technique (6)

20 Blanket Girl gobbles up Rene (7)

21 Swear Spielberg film with implausible ending is rather feeble (6)

23 State aid bungled by House (5)

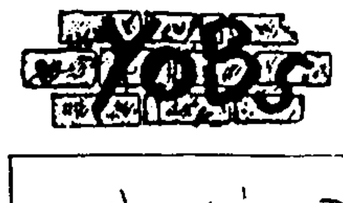
25 Misses 'Monday disease' (5)

Crossword 201 winner: JASON LOFTS

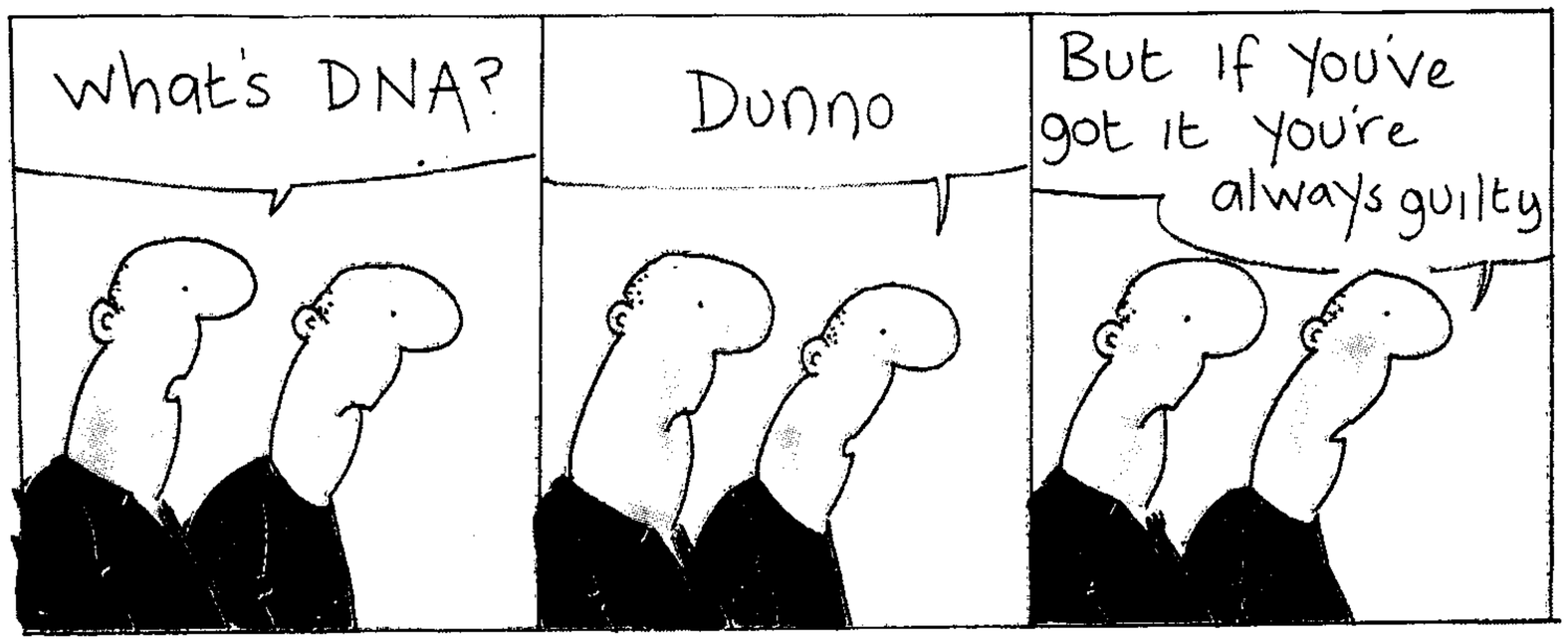
Solution to Crossword 201

ACROSS: 1/19/27 Getting one's end away 5 Guffaws 9 Antic 10 Esoterica 11 Bugs Bunny 12 Drunk 13 Debt 14 Codswallop 18 Shirtiness 22 Let on 24 Swear-word 25 Bum around 26 Piety 28 Reposed.

DOWN: 1 Grabbed 2 Tito Gobbi 3 Incubi 4 Greenhorn 5 Goofy 6 Freudian 7 Adieu 8 Shack up 15 Suspender 16 Londoners 17 St Andrew 18 Soluble 20 Sad-eyed 21 Wrap up 23 Tamed 24 Saucy.



HUSBAND



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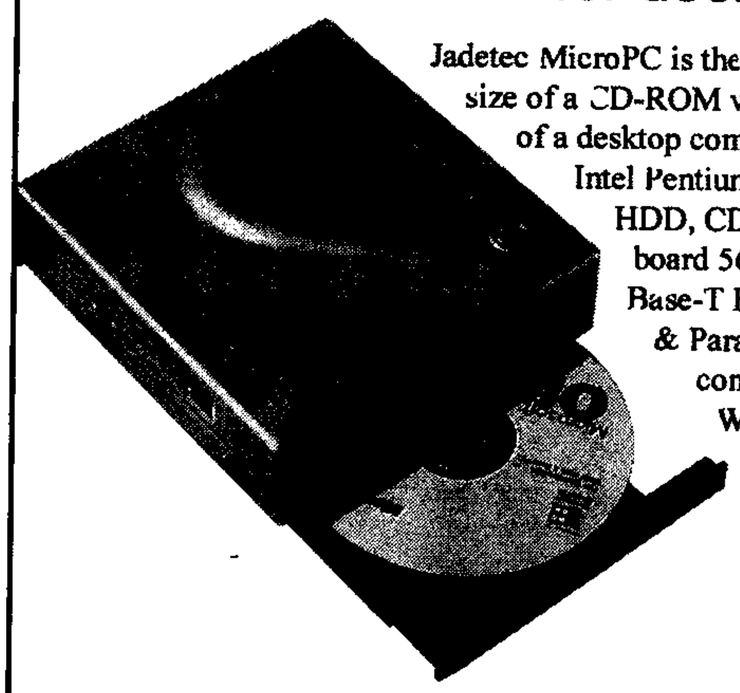

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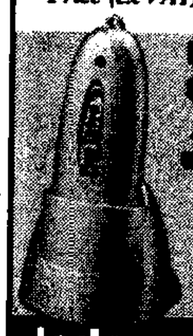

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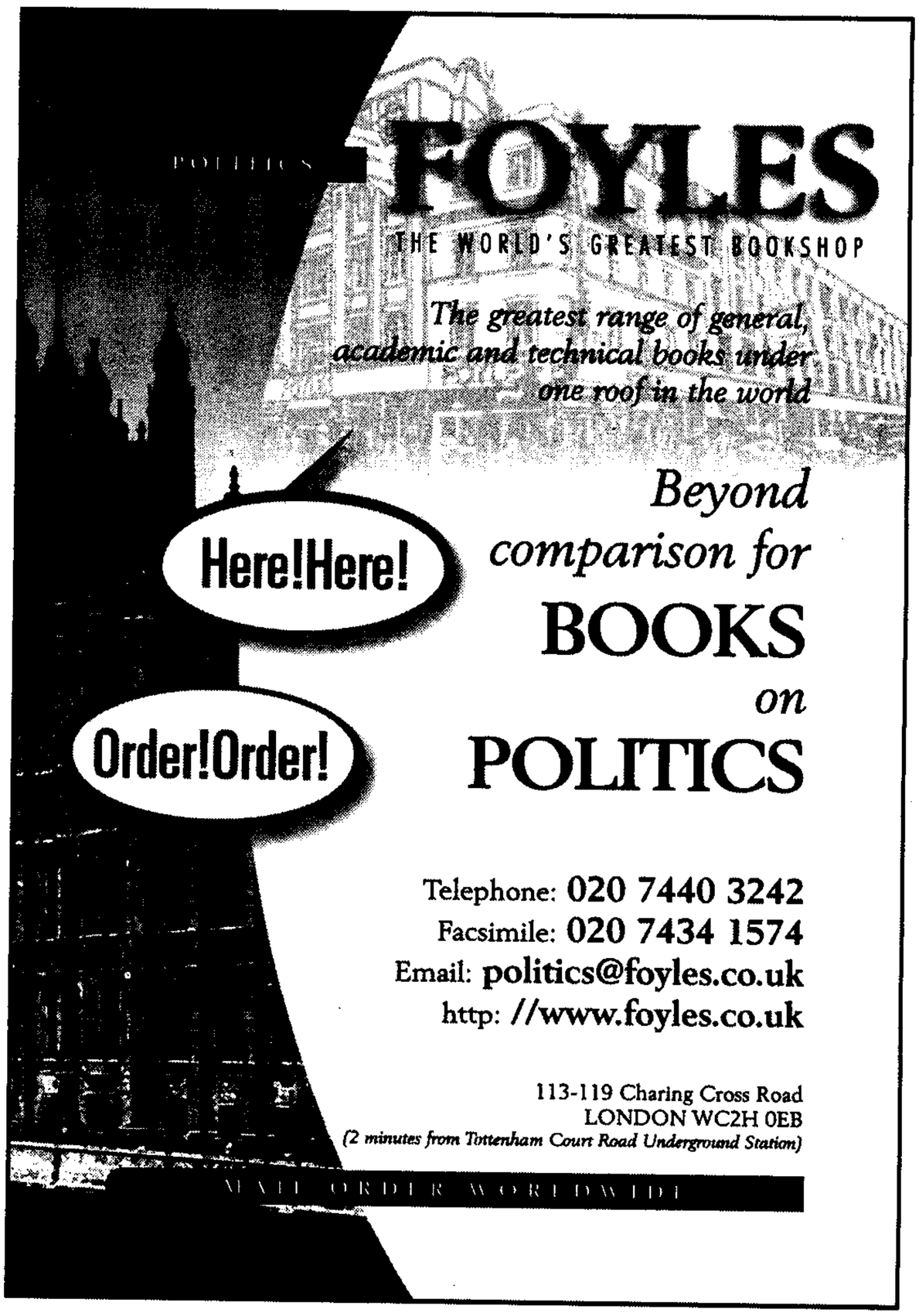
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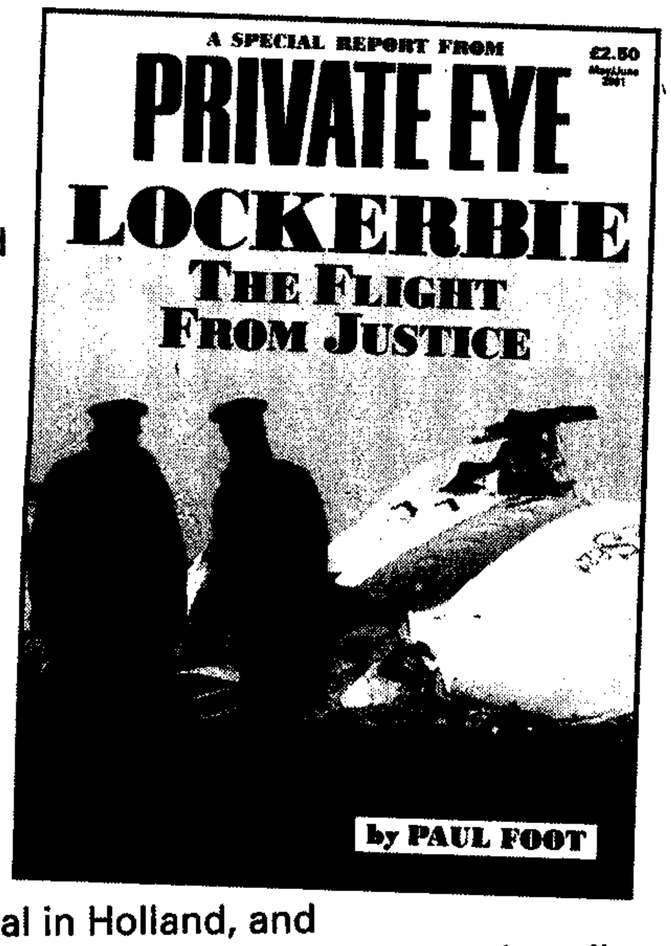

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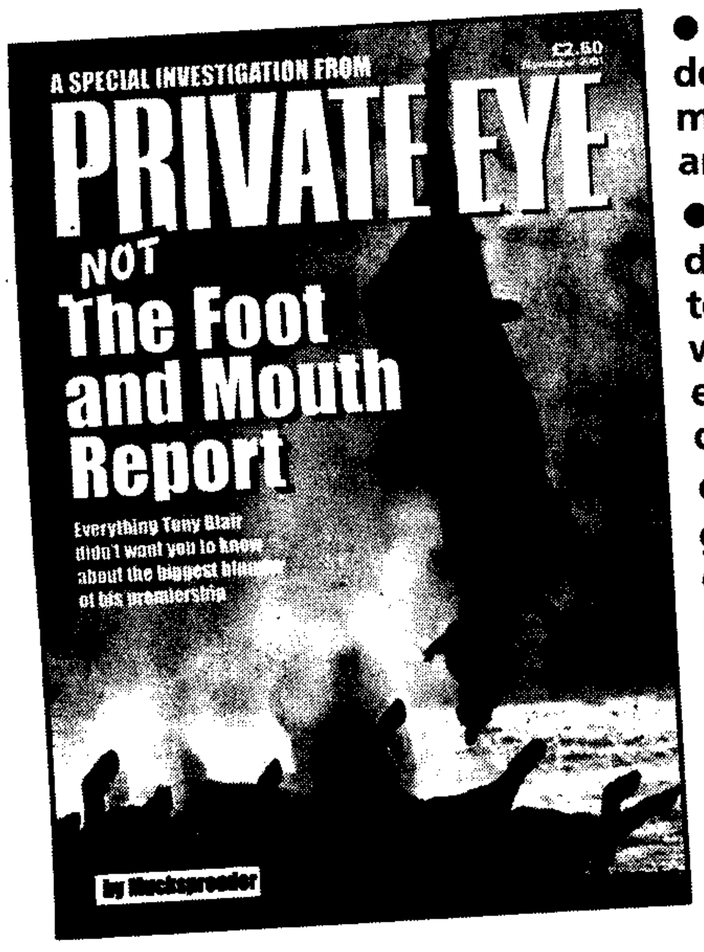
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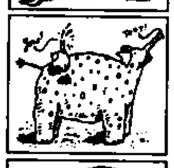

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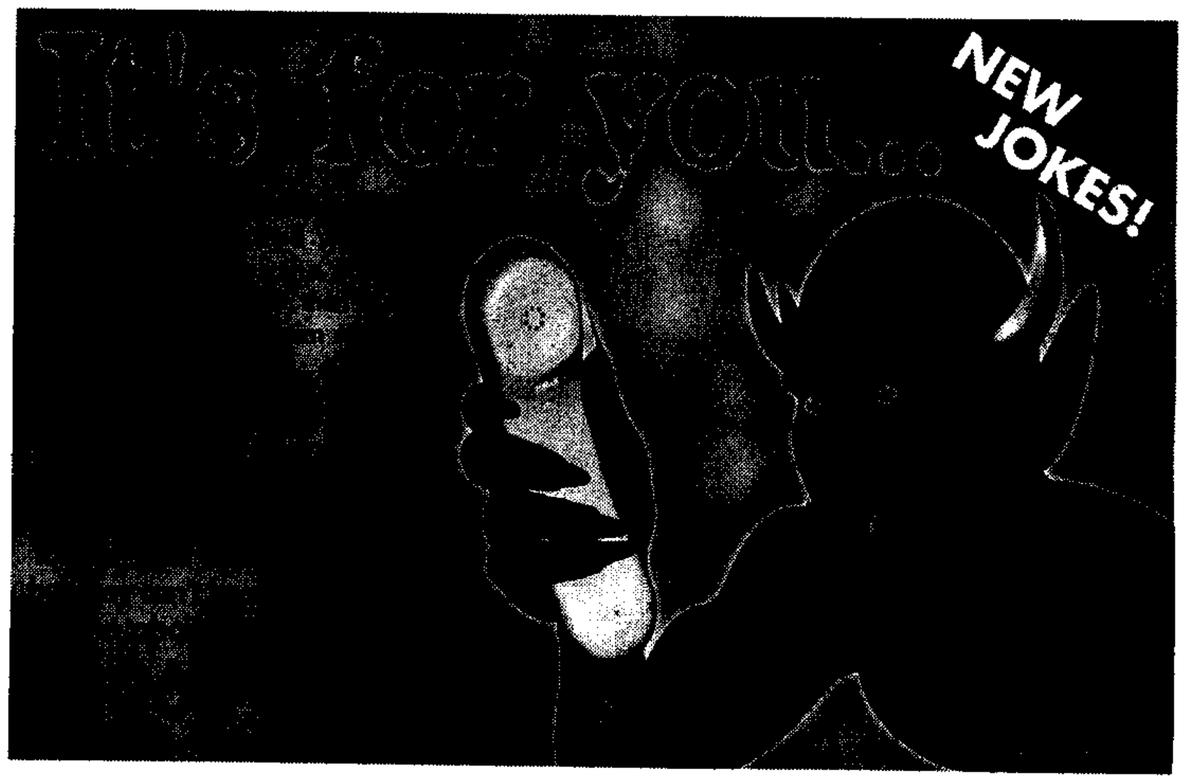

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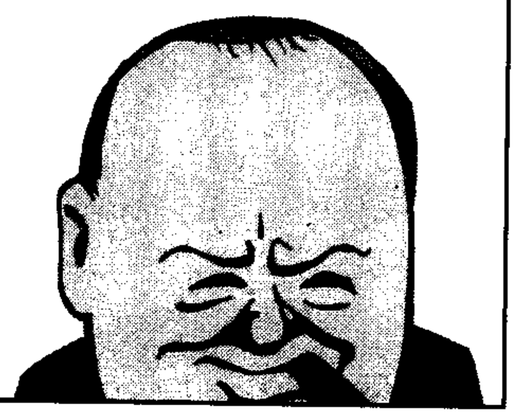

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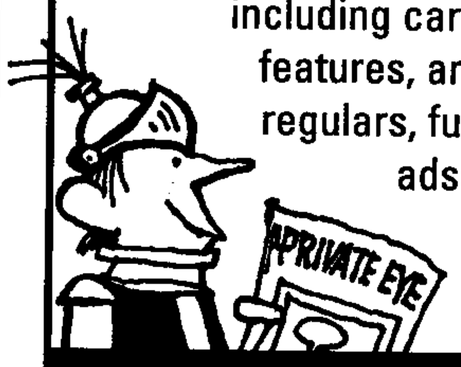

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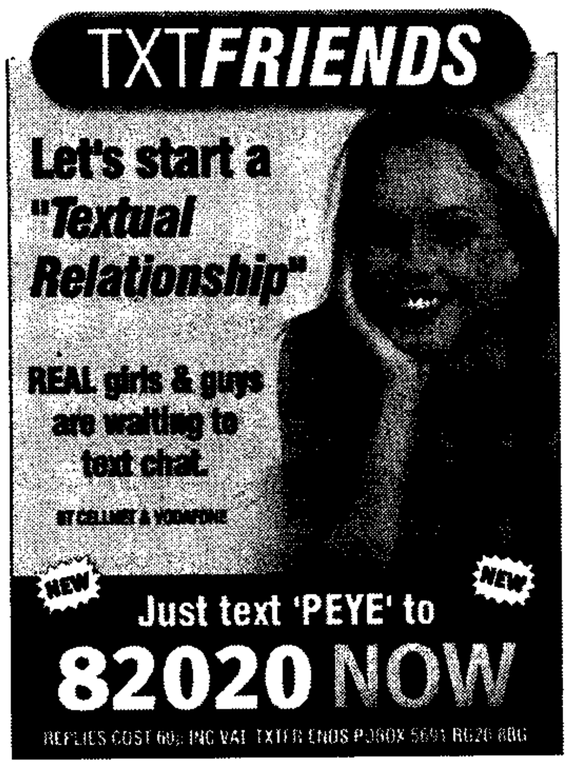

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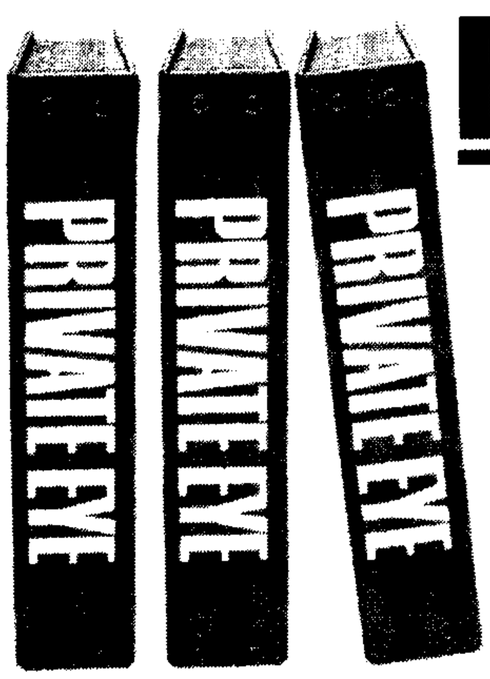

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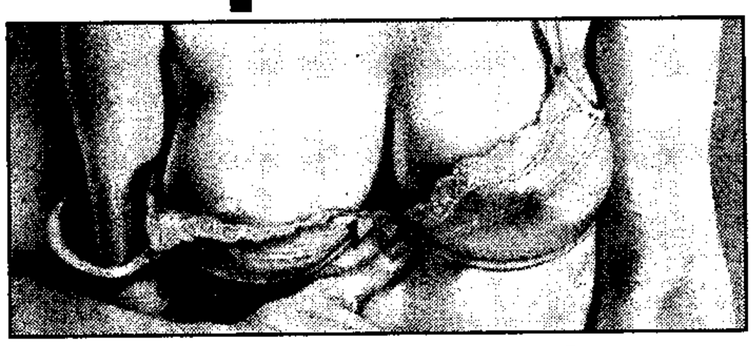

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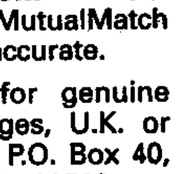


RESPECTABLE SINCERE marriage-minded Thai ladies seek like-minded gentlemen. Free brochure/ video. "Lawrence Lynch – dream weaver" (Louis Theroux BBC). 01562 748600 (24hrs). www.thai-professional.com

PRIVATE ADULT PENFRIENDS – 3x27p stamps to EPPS, PO Box 36, Dartford, DA2 7ZU.

ATTACHED? SEEKING ROMANCE? Call David at LOVING LINKS 020 7602 8727. Info line 0906 550 1361– www.lovinglinks.co.uk – Discreet dating at the speed of E-mail.

ADDITIONS – 'ATTACHED' Discreet Loving Agency for married people. 020 8905 3304, 020 8958 9657. Established 1992.

MATCHMAKER MAG for adult contacts: over 900 photos. APPROVAL copy from: MATCHMAKER, (S.76), Chorley, PR7 4BS. Or ring: 01257 480155 (24 hours).

Findyourperfectpartner.com – YOU MAY JUST CLICK! Our MutualMatch system is the world's most accurate.

PERSON TO PERSON for genuine friends and partners, all ages, U.K. or overseas. Details: (Dept PE) P.O. Box 40, Minehead, TA24 5YS – 01643 709509.

CHAT ROOM 25p/min. 100+ girls online 24hrs. JCG, tn219dz, 09062 765 264.

MARGARET'S SPECIAL PEN CLUB – new friends uk/overseas. Sae: PO Box 1, Prestwick, Ayrshire KA9 1RJ. Est. 1986.

'CONTACT GENUINE SINGLE WOMEN & MEN online 24hrs. 60p/min, JCG, tn21 8xz – 09063 620246.

BEAUTIFUL RUSSIAN LADIES – Colour brochures, trips. No membership fee. Quick contact. Call Nick & Lilya 0113 2733442 (24hrs) – www.russian-rendezvous.co.uk

HEDONISM CLUB. Adult Parties, Clubbing, Holidays. 09099 100185 (75p/min) – www. hedonism.org.uk

MISS JAPAN INTRODUCTIONS AG – ROMANCE, MARRIAGE. Offices: UK, Europe, Japan. www.mr-england.com – internet campaign Tel: 020 7738 0666.

NATURAL FRIENDS – QUALITY ON & OFF-LINE INTRODUCTIONS. Free brochure: 0800 281 933. www.natural-friends.com

FREE CONTACTS /adult parties. Club membership pack: www.club-aphrodite.com – 0870 220 2527.

THAI LADIES – Superb videos. Colour brochure SIAM INTRODUCTIONS (established 14 years) as seen on TV (22 times!) – 01689 860880. www.siam-intro.com

RUSSIAN LADIES SEEK RELATIONSHIP / MARRIAGE. Introductions in UK. Affordable trips to Moscow/St. Petersburg. Unlimited introductions. Excellent success rate. Phone IFM 01708 478697.

THAI CONNECTION – 600 marriages. Featured Thai TV BEST AGENCY, video/brochure – 01582 481725.

THAI PARTNERS. NEW ETHICAL AGENCY INTRODUCES YOUR IDEAL WIFE. Brochure, video 07810 562024 – kthcastell@aol.com

BRAND NEW CLUB CONCEPT for broadminded adults /singles, gays, lesbians. Hurry – limited membership! www.clubseduct.com

LONELY HEARTS: CHAT & DATE 0906 752 6299*, LIVE 1-2-1 CHAT 0906 734 3206**. *75p/min.**£1/min. PO Box 17, Ashford Kent, TN23 7YQ – www.harmonypartners.co.uk

EYE SEEK

BOY WHO NEVER GREW UP SEEKS GIRL for strictly platonic relationship. Interests: flying, fighting pirates, socialising with fairies. Call: 'WHO'S IN THE BAG?' – 0800 389 4748.

EYE LOVE

GORGEOUS WOMAN WITH BALL & CHAIN, seeks tall unattached bloke 35-45 with bolt cutters. normalrulesdonotapply@hotmail.com

TALL, VERY ATTRACTIVE, N/S LADY, 59, still sexy – seeks 'young at heart' male with intelligence, wit and style. Photo essential. Box 1747.

NO BORING YOUNG FARTS, but a mature, amusing and educated man in his 50's wanted by feisty, intelligent woman. Bristol. Box 0347.

ARTS AND MUSIC LOVING MALE, 40s, celibate marriage, seeks mutual fulfilment with interesting, spirited female. Can travel. Box 0247.

MALE, 44, SEEKS SLENDER LADY for occasional liaisons. Devon. 07788773734.

NICE TALL BLOKE, 51, seeks attractive fecund female (w.kids?) for life, family, adventures S.France – mikeandor@hotmail.com

TALL FUNNY SENSITIVE SINGLE postgrad male 36 seeks genuine nubile brainy lady 25-40 for erotic adventures. Own teeth essential. Kent. Box 0947.

HELPFUL STEPMOM seeks wife for well-heeled computer engineer stepson (35). Petite intelligent lady with GSOH in SE would suit. Only those seeking a committed partnership should reply. Photo appreciated/returned. Box 2047.

NOVELIST SEEKS HEROINE – Successful, London-based male author, 53, seeks female to inspire him. novelistuk1@yahoo.co.uk or write Box 0445.

ATTRACTIVE 'OLDER' MAN, professional, educated, married, very, very, very wide interests – WLTM 'older' lady (50-65) years, married or single, for discreet uninhibited affair. You are educated, interesting and randy. Looks unimportant, passion is. Inner London area, preferably. Box 1547.

FIRM BREASTED INTREPID 30 SOMETHING with acerbic sense of humour seeks clever resourceful man for explorations and merriment. Box 1247.

SMALL, UNASSUMING, EDUCATED GENT, 37, looking for intelligent, sensitive woman in London area. E-mail: fidoah@hotmail.com

ATTRACTIVE YOUNG ITALIAN LADY seeks generous professional man for comfort. Box 0147.

GOODLOOKING, TALL, SLIM, STYLISH, successful female, 40's – seeks male counterpart. mssh915@aol.com

1968 MODEL Intelligent educated male seeks lady owner (18-35) of a similar disposition. E-mail CarRchrd@aol.com

WELL-OFF, WELL EDUCATED GUY, 43, fit, funny, married and frustrated, seeks large breasted woman, any age, to lavish presents and passion on' – on an occasional basis. Photo helps. London. Box 1447.

YOU FEMALE – married, unsatisfied – me handsome, tactile, discrete, free daytime – londontouch@hotmail.com

M30++, HAPPILY MARRIED, BALD but fit, seeks F30++ for dangerous, passionate, secretive affair. Dirty weekends... Size 12. Must like rabbits. Bunnylover25@hotmail.com

EASY-GOING BLOKE, 35, seeks n/s woman who would enjoy an occasional massage. London – mr_floppy@talk21.com

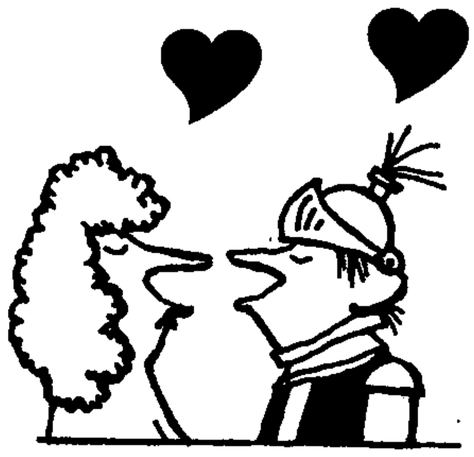
SCRUMPTIOUS FEMALE SCRABBLE PLAYER, very young 40, missing the word LOVE – can you help? missingword@hotmail.com

PILOT, 28, SEEKING PROFESSIONAL PARTNER FOR ALPINE ADVENTURES, laughter and relationship. Edinburgh based. Box 0146.

PINK EYE

FEEL LIKE A PINT and a decent conversation? – 30, fit, friendly, gsoh, London. – talldarknhandsome@dogmail.co.uk

GORGEOUSLY STUNNING BLONDE – sorry boys, this London trannie seeking Frenetic, Flirtatious, Females for Fun, Friendship and Frolics. Box 1847.



VALENTINE MESSAGES 2002

❤ FLUTTER BY – let's shake a tower, fight a liar and fry tuck like a couple of tuna licks. Under the B chord, SPOONMAN.

❤ DARLING BARKY, Happy 2nd Anniversary, love from your Girly Girl.

❤ HUNKY, you're my 1st, my last, my everything – M. XXXX

❤ ROSES ARE RED. The EROTIC REVIEW is blue. To subscribe, call 01732 744 038.

❤ KAY – tame builder now house trained – needs loving home please

❤ DEBORAH SIMPSON – you ARE an elf-girl, like that lad said who works with my mum.

❤ TO ME SNAKEY – give us a snuggle; DRIPPY WILLY.

❤ MS PEARL PRINCESS – I have escaped from natural history museum. Brace yourself! From Darling ENTELODONT.

❤ R. YOU ARE VERY WONDERFUL, you make me so happy. I love you. A.

❤ I LOOKED UP FROM MY BOOKS and noticed you were still there – thanks lovely Richie – LYNNE XXX

❤ WINNIT loves Minky Woman always – LOCAL ROMANCE.

❤ CAPITAINE, you... the most precious jewel to possess. ILY. Sous-Fifre.

❤ "AGE CANNOT WEARY HER nor custom stale / Her infinity variety." She reads THE EROTIC REVIEW. To subscribe, call 01732 744 038.

❤ ALWAYS My Nice Erotic Kisses Winner – even in the grey days of 2002. Perhaps See Me Kneel sometime?

❤ SWEET DEVIL – A bad little dog moved into YOUR neighbourhood! Sniffs & smells – DEBBI XXXXX

❤ WIGLIT! Wiglit! Wiglit! WUBBOO! – Wabbit.

❤ LUCINDA – pig out? Love VINNIE.

❤ PAGE 1: SEX. Page 2: sex. Page 3: sex. Page 4: sex. Page 5: sex. Pages 6-48: sex. Every issue of THE EROTIC REVIEW is a Valentine issue. To subscribe, call 01732 744 038.

❤ TO TINA, One year on, still no custard. Love from SEAMUS.

❤ BUSTER AND YVONNE – now 30 years on. Our love remains strong.

❤ CMCR – still crazy after all these years.

❤ PIG – let's make rumpy pumpy soon! Love hugs kisses NUKE.

❤ A THRILLER AT BEDTIME? Yes, and reading aloud increases the excitement... but that's not the only reason I love International Law so much.

❤ NIGHTINGALES – still no garlic prawn spaghetti – RAJA

❤ WHY SHOULD I? Why – should I?

❤ GEORGIE – see you in Dungloe.

❤ DIAMOND and pussy willow lover. Stay REDICK xxxx

❤ A VALENTINE LIMERICK? Yes,/ The author is easy to guess/(Despite anonymity), For he makes it clear in it: E/Is the one that H loves to caress.

❤ CUPID'S STUPID, Roses die. One Valentine doesn't lie. THE EROTIC REVIEW. To subscribe, call 01732 744 038.

❤ A VALENTINE is just for a day. The EROTIC REVIEW goes on all year. To subscribe, call 01732 744 038.

❤ TINKERBELL – Piglet loves you so much.

❤ SHOW HER THE DESIRES OF YOUR BODY and the Literary perception of your mind. Give her a subscription to THE EROTIC REVIEW. Call 01732 744 038.

❤ DISTINCTIVE GINGER indoor gardener furry bits and no dancing.

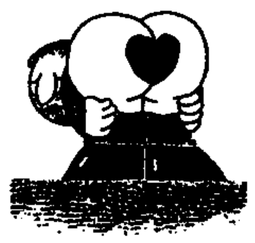
❤ TO MY BIRD IN BRUSSELS / Been for my first lesson / Ik ben wel een flikker / Ik heb je nodig / Ik hou van je

❤ IF WHAT HE REALLY LOVES is a good writer, give him a subscription to THE EROTIC REVIEW. Call 01732 744 038. And he'll really love you.

❤ LYDIA ANGGRAENI, aku cinta- kini dan selalu – tetapi jika terpisah, sekali lagi...

"WHEN YOU SAID YOU WERE A LATIN LOVER I EXPECTED SOMETHING ELSE"

Winner of two bottles of personalised his'n'hers champagne for the best Valentine message announced next issue!



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Oliver Sweeney